**2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, **4**  who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. **5** For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. **6**  If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. **7** Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

**Luke 12:35-40**

 “Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, **36** and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. **37**  Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. **38** If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! **39**  But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. **40** You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Intro: Unwrapping the gift of charity

Charity brings compassion.

Charity comes at a cost.

Charity looks to Christ.

 In the name of Jesus. Amen. Tonight we begin our mid-week Advent meditations. Since Christmas season has much to do about gift giving, several saints help us to consider what this means. The first is known better than even the name of a president. Strangely enough, Santa Claus or St. Nicholas was actually unpopular in American society about two hundred years ago. Much of this came from the aversion Puritans and other protestants had against saints. However, things shifted with Christmas in the 1800’s. “Childhood was coming to be seen as a stage of life…And so the season came gradually to be tamed, turning toward shops and home. St. Nicholas, too, took on new attributes to fit the changing times.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The 20th century and still today, is not about the Saint, but the Santa who is good for sales.

 Of course, our cultural Santa Claus, like many things, is plastic compared to the figure of St. Nicholas. His life has many legendary stories, but it is still better than elves, reindeer, and flying sleds. However, what we do know is that he lived 270 A.D. to 343 A.D. and was a bishop or pastor. His place of residence was in the city of Myra, which would be in present day Turkey. Celebrating this saint in other places of the world, like Germany, means giving a gift to children on Dec. 6th. The key to St. Nicholas is unwrapping the gift of charity that finally receives what God has given to us in His Son.

1. **Charity brings compassion.**
2. St. Nicholas was known for helping others in need.
* As the story goes, three daughters of a poor man who had no dowry for marriage.
* The Christian life goes out of its way as James says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (1:27).
1. St. Nicholas was also known for confessing Christ.
* Since he lived in the 4th century, some noted him being at the Council of Nicaea where the Nicaean Creed arose and what we still confess today.
* The Christian life is being dressed for action, but also as Jesus tells his disciples, “keep your lamps burning…”
1. **Yet, charity comes at a cost.**
2. St. Nicholas had to make a monetary sacrifice.
* He used church funds to help the three daughters, doing what the rich young man who walked away from Jesus could not do.
* The cost of giving is personal Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24)
1. Good old St. Nick was also thrown into the slammer.
* For a time, the powers at be during the Council of Nicaea sided with the wrong confession of Christ and that meant a loss.
* The cost of confessing Jesus and His Word has always been dangerous, but faithfulness stands on this fact, “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes.”
1. **Charity means looking to Christ.**
2. More than physical acts of charity, Jesus has made His sacrifice the perfect gift for sinners.
* St. Nicholas gave only because Christ redeemed him with the gift that no sinner can give themselves.
* Gift giving is good, but charity comes from Christ and His love having won all things for a sinful humanity by the cross.
1. More than suffering for confessing the truth, Christ has truly suffered once for all.
* Without Jesus being fully God, His sacrifice would be insufficient and St. Nic knew this meant no lasting salvation.
* Love is insufficient without faith in God’s love for St. Paul says, “we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

 Maybe the war on Christmas makes us miss what we already have not for boosting sales, but the real Santa Claus as Christians. Unwrapping the gift of charity carries both good words about Christ and generous deeds in His name. St. Nicholas takes us to Christmas and a nice ornament to get is Santa kneeling at the manger. There is God’s gift of compassion born for our sake. Here is why the Father sends His Son for He charitably goes to His cross for us. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/origin-of-santa/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)