

The world does many things backwards, and especially those things that really matter before God. This is Advent. It's not Christmas. Christmas is two weeks away. Advent is more of a somber and sober season. It is a season of repentance. There is no *Merry Advent* greeting. We can have joy in Advent. But the joyous celebration of Christmas comes afterwards.

But not to the world. The world celebrates Christmas before, long before the holiday arrives. The merriness is now. There is no somber nor sober attitude. There is no repentance. Yet the day after Christmas, the world loses most of its merriment. In a way, Advent for the world, comes after Christmas, not before. The world is backwards.

This is, perhaps, most clearly seen when it comes to life and death. To the world, life comes before death. "*Eat, drink, and be merry,*" says the rich fool in St. Luke. "Live it up! Grab all the gusto you can out of life, for today we live, tomorrow we die!"

Now, at first glance, we may be inclined to agree. There is no law for Christians that we cannot enjoy life before we die. But that's not the point here. The point is that we who are in Christ enjoy life after death. In heaven? Sure. We will enjoy that life forever. Yet I am referring to your life right now. The life you live by faith in the Son of God. This life, that you have in Christ, does not come before you die; it comes after you die.

Confused? Not if you have in mind your baptism into Christ. In baptism, writes St. Paul, we die. We die with Christ. And that death must occur for us to have life. We must die with Christ in our baptism so that we are raised to life with Him in baptism.

Now, sadly, I think it is true that far too many Christians put their baptism in the past, and not in the present. Yes, you were baptized in the past. But baptism is like marriage. What husband, if he had any wisdom at all, would place his marriage in the past? Rather than saying, "I was married," he would say, if he was smart, "I am married." What happened in the past is still relevant in the present.

The same is true of baptism. You were baptized, yes. But far better to say, "I am baptized." The life you were given in your baptism is still the life you have right now. And, in fact, because it is true, this life will never end. It cannot die.

"But," you say, "I will die one day." What of it? The separation of your body and soul cannot bring to an end the life you have in Christ Jesus in your baptism. You died with Christ, and you were raised to life with Him. And for you, therefore, the life that you have right now in Christ is a life that cannot die because He can no longer die. "*Everyone,*" says Jesus, "*who lives and believes in Me will never die.*"

So, here we are in Advent with Christmas coming. Advent before Christmas is repentance before forgiveness, death before life. But you cannot have one without the other. Repentance must take place for sins to be forgiven. And forgiveness must be given to the one who repents. Repentance

is death, forgiveness is life. In repentance we die to sin. And with the forgiveness of our sins, there is life, life in Jesus.

The world has it all backwards. Christmas, then Advent. Life first, then death. And repentance? “Well,” says the world, “I’m having too much fun to repent now. I’ll repent at the end before I die.”

No Christian would say that. You would not say that, would you? Because repentance is a daily thing for you. It’s because you live each day in your baptism. It’s always in the present tense. For you, each day is both Advent and Christmas. Each day you die to sin, and you are raised to life in Jesus. Every day, for you, is a day you repent of your sin, and believe that in Jesus you are forgiven of your sin. We never really leave the season of Advent because we never move beyond the need for daily repentance.

And where there is Advent, Christmas follows. Every day there is forgiveness for you. Every day, for you, Jesus is present in your baptism. He is the forgiveness of your sins. He is your life and your salvation.

Dear Christian, think about this. Every day you stand before God as one who is baptized into Jesus. Every day, therefore, you stand before God as one who is forgiven of all your sin.

So, even if you do not say, “Merry Advent!” you have joy. Every day you rejoice because every day Christ, Christmas, and your baptism – these are all in the present tense. Amen.