**Sermon 12/16/18**

**Gospel Reading Luke 3:7-18**

Gordon McDonald is a writer who frequently gives lectures throughout the U. S.

At one of his lectures there was a Nigerian woman who was a physician

            at a great teaching hospital in the United States.

Following the presentation, this distinguished woman approached Gordon

          to ask a question.

She introduced herself using an American name.

"What is your African name?" McDonald asked.

She immediately gave it to him, several syllables long, with a musical sound to it.

"What does the name mean?" He asked her.

She answered, "It means 'Child who takes the anger away.'"

When McDonald inquired as to why she would have been given this name,

     she said, "My parents had been forbidden by their parents to marry.

     But they loved each other so much they refused to accept

     the families' opinions and married anyway.

     For several years they were ostracized from both their families.

    Then my mother became pregnant with me.

    When the grandparents held me in their arms for the first time,

    the walls of hostility came down.

    I became the one who swept the anger away.

   And that's the name my mother and father gave me."

McDonald commented that her name would be a suitable one for Jesus.

He was the child who takes our anger away.

Jesus came to us as a little baby at Christmas to take away

       our anger, guilt, fear, doubt, and sin.

As we celebrate his coming into our world,

        we begin to experience his joy and peace.

This is the season to nurture a joyful spirit.

John the Baptist proclaimed repentance as the beginning of experiencing God's joy.

For John repentance meant much more than to feel sorry about something.

It is more than confessing, with no hope of real change.

John believed in a repentance which radically altered one's direction and life.

True repentance leads us to a changed heart and a changed life.

It fills our hearts and lives with a great spiritual joy.

Blessed Jordan of Saxony was the Master General of the Dominican Order

      in the thirteenth century.

Once during night prayer, a novice experienced a giggling fit.

It quickly proved contagious, and soon all the novices were giggling.

A scandalized brother tried to threaten them into silence,

        but Jordan rebuked him, saying, "Who made you novice master?

Then he told the young men, "Laugh on!

You may well laugh, for you have escaped from the Devil,

      who formerly held you in bondage. Laugh away, dear sons!"

Repentance frees us from our burden of sin, and sets us free to laugh,

          and to experience real joy.

The word "repent" means to turn back, change, turn around.

The simple act of turning is reflective of a change of heart and mind.

We consider where we are, and return to the solid ground of God's presence,

          and if necessary, choosing a different road than the one we are on.

Repentance prepares the way for Jesus to come into our hearts.

Real repentance is meant to be fruitful,

         so our lives should bear fruit worthy of our repentance.

John the Baptist proclaimed the good news to the people.

He did not demand that

they wear sackcloth, and sit in ashes to express their repentance.

He did not tell them to offer more sacrifices in the temple.

And the crowds asked him: "What then should we do?"

John told us to share what we have with those in need.

Plain and simple – Share what you have with others.

Whoever has two cloaks, should share one.

Whoever has food, should share it.

Simple isn't it? And yet, not so simple.

Sharing is not something we naturally do as human beings,

        especially when sharing means giving something away.

We have a strong tendency to hold on to things and say "mine."

We hold on tightly and do not want to let go.

Sharing is something that we have to learn.

Sharing is not always easy when you really think about it.

Meyer Reinhold was an author who wrote textbooks

       about various periods in ancient history.

He was asked by an interviewer for his reflections on the period

        when Christianity was introduced.

He answered: "The Christians did something that had never been done before,

        except perhaps in a few isolated cases.

But the Christians made it the centerpiece of their lives, and it worked. "

"What was it?" the interviewer asked.

Reinhold replied: "Living for others."

John proclaimed, "Prepare the way for the Lord."

Make room in your life for Him. Beat a path to God's throne room.

Straighten out those crooked roads, and smooth out the bumpy places.

Help those whom you have the ability to help.

Be God's light to the world, showing His love, and grace, and power.

The people asked him: "What then shall we do?"

And he answered share, share what you have.

Many will say: "I don't have much to give."

Mother Teresa said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, just feed one."

Do what you can, with what you have.

          Love one another.

Some children were asked what love is.

One said, "Love is when my mommy makes a cup of coffee for my daddy and

          takes a little taste before she gives it to him to make sure it tastes okay."

Another said, "Love is when your puppy licks your face,

        even after you've left him alone all day."

One answered: "You really shouldn't say, 'I love you' unless you really mean it,

          but if you mean it, you should say it a lot, because people forget."

One boy said, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different.

          You just know that your name is safe in their mouth."

A little girl said: "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas

          if you stop opening presents, and listen."

Love came down at Christmas.

God loves us so much, we have plenty of love to share.

Love never runs out.

There is always more to give.

How can we prepare to see, experience, welcome God?

Come close and linger near the baby in a manger.

Then go, and share God's love with everyone you can.

AMEN