

Homily for December 6, 2009 (2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C)
Baruch 5:1-9; Psalm 126 1-6; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

SANTA IN SLAMMER

St. Nick Arrested in Mall Melee

By Mike Byline, Briarwood Bee Staff Writer

Santa Claus, beloved gift-bearer to countless generations of children throughout the world, found himself in the County Jail last night after he was arrested by Briarwood Police after a disturbance at the Mammon Mall. A copy of the complaint obtained by the *Bee* indicated that Mr. Claus, AKA “St. Nicholas” and “St. Nick,” was charged with disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace.

According to mall officials, nothing seemed out of the ordinary for a Tuesday evening at the mall until about 7:15 PM. That was when Mr. Claus, after speaking with his last little visitor to the “X-treme North Pole” display, reportedly shed his traditional red coat and pants and changed into an outfit that appeared to be made out camel’s hair. He then allegedly climbed to the roof of the gingerbread house, rang a bell, and unfurled a banner reading: *Every shopping aisle shall be filled in, and every sale bin made low/ The winding lines shall be made straight; and the rain checks and layaways shall be no more/ And all flesh shall see that salvation is not wrapped and under the tree.*

Witnesses reported that upon unrolling the banner, Mr. Claus continued to ring the bell and used the display’s PA system to proclaim the message. A few shoppers were apparently so displeased by the demonstration that they began screaming and cursing at “St. Nick.” Mall security was alerted to the situation, and they in turn called police when some patrons began pelting Mr. Claus with the free Christmas cookies that were available at the mall’s Hospitality Center.

“I was expecting Elvis and *Blue Christmas*,” said Elizabeth Crocker, who was trying to track down some more Zhu Zhu Pets for her grandchildren. “Instead, we had to listen to....this man’s ranting. It certainly didn’t put me in the holiday spirit.” Mall Manager Bill Cash added, “We expect all of our employees and vendors to do what they can to enhance the shopping experience, and this was clearly not up to our standards. We apologize to anyone who was offended.”

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Friday at the County Courthouse.

The word Advent comes from two Latin words, *ad + venire*, which together literally mean “to come to” someone or something. Most Catholics know that this is the season in which we prepare to celebrate God’s coming to us, particularly in the person of Jesus our Christ, whose birth we recall and celebrate at Christmas.

Thus we heard St. Luke recall the work of John the Baptist and the words of Isaiah: “Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths.” But Advent is much more than getting ready to commemorate a past event.

The great medieval abbot, St. Bernard, reflected in one of his sermons that in this season we actually celebrate *three* comings of Christ: *In his first coming our Lord came in our flesh and in our weakness; in this middle coming he comes in spirit and in power; in the final coming he will be seen in glory and majesty.*

In celebrating Advent we too often focus on what Bernard called the first and final comings of Christ; but we sometimes neglect the middle. Yet don’t we proclaim in our Memorial Acclamation: “Christ has died, *Christ is risen*, Christ will come again?” In Advent we remember with gratitude the first coming of Christ; we live in hope for the third; but *live* in the middle coming, here and now.

That middle can be the toughest place to live, especially these days. I began writing this homily on the eve that President Obama announced his plans to devote another 30,000 troops and tens of billions of dollars to what has become a protracted war in Afghanistan. At the same time, so many people are out of work, looking for more work, and wondering how they are going to manage their mortgage payments, utility and food bills, much less their Christmas gift lists.

I recently saw a report that said that while Christmas shoppers spent an average of \$412 in 2008, they are expected to spend an average of “only” \$390 this year. More notably, however, 22% of those surveyed said that they will spend less than \$100 this year. That news may not be good for the retailers or for our economy, but it could be a blessing in disguise for Advent and Christmas; for it might invite more of us to ask an essential question of this season: *For what or whom are we really preparing?* Can we, like the early church of Philippi for whom St. Paul prayed, learn “to discern what is of value?”

Advent is not only a time to reflect on Christ’s coming to us—yesterday, tomorrow, and today—it also calls us to reflect on *our coming to Christ*, here and now! When John began his ministry near the Jordan, St. Luke recalls, he went about “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Forgiveness was something that God would do; but it could not be effective without a response. People not only had to be cleansed outwardly by immersing themselves in the waters of baptism but also cleansed inwardly through repentance.

What are the crooked paths in our lives that need to be straightened? What are the valleys of depression, despair and division that could be filled in? What are the mountains of pride, denial or even delusion that need to be leveled? What are the rough ways—particularly in how we sometimes treat those closest to us—that need to be smoothed by kindness, compassion, and justice?

May God, who has begun this good work of Advent in us bring it to completion in Christ Jesus our Lord, in spirit and in power. +