As we move through the advent season we get bombarded more and more by the marketing hype stirred up by the commercialization of a religious holiday. Sadly this joyful feast of the incarnation has been highjacked by the secular world. The result of this onslaught is the unrealistic expectations in both children and adults for the treasures to be found under the Christmas tree. This often leads to buying sprees made possible by the misuse of credit cards. At the beginning of the New Year, there are many who are more hungover with the regrets of increased debt and buyers remorse, than from too much distilled spirits. Then there is the discovery that more toys won’t bring the joy promised in the greeting cards now relinquished to the recycle can. When this happens to us we realize that we have not fully lived up to the slogan, “Keep Christ in Christmas” bumper sticker, on the family car.

Even the patron saint of Christmas, St. Nicolas, has been transformed from a 4th Century Bishop from the ancient town of Myra, to a jolly man in a red suit who hands out gifts to children based on whether or not they are naughty or nice. The Americanized version we call Santa Claus has come down to us from the Dutch name “Sinterklaas.” The story of the gifts he gave was from
the time when a poor family with three girls lost their mother. The grieving and desperate widower fell into despair, for he had no money for a dowry, and so could not secure their future. Sadly he was tempted to sell his daughters into prostitution just so they could eat. When the Bishop realized this he got three bags of gold and threw them through the window of the home, thus providing the needed dowry so resolve their dilemma.

This is the true meaning of Christmas. God send’s his only Son, born of a woman, to give birth to love, a love that saves us of our sins, and save us from ourselves. To ransom us from a life where we are often tempted to compromise our beliefs just to survive. By coming to earth as truly one of us, God is saying, “I know your pain, I know your suffering, I know your sickness, and I know your despair and confusion; because I have experienced all of these as one of you.” So when John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, “Are you the one who is to come.” John waits for the answer back with great anticipation to see for sure what he has already believed in faith, is really true. He, like us, wants to understand who this Jesus is. He, like us, believes, but at times we doubt. He, like us, can become imprisoned in our fear, in our doubt, in “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” (Shakespeare – Hamlet) Remember, John will soon loose his life as a direct result of speaking the truth of God to the powers that be. Are we ready to step out in this kind of faith or do we hold back for lack of faith. Oh, how foolish we (you) are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!” (Luke 24: 25)

The answer comes back to John, “the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” (Matthew 11:5) Imagine how relieved John was to know that if he lost his life for proclaiming the truth of God, it would not be the end but only the beginning! Imagine for us that if we are blind in our understanding, lame in our faith, leprous in our sins, deaf to the Good News or the walking-dead of the secular world, or poor in spirit… “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” (John 3:16)