

What is the number one cause of car accidents today? There are lots of causes. Obviously, inclement weather and driving under the influence of alcohol are big contributors. Cell phones. Text messages. Eating. Adjusting the radio. Some people driving in the cities during the morning rush hour have actually been spotted shaving, or putting on make-up, or doing their hair, while they are driving. I would agree that multi-tasking certainly has its place, but not while driving, and especially not in busy traffic! Really, there are all kinds of causes for car accidents today, but you can boil them all down to one. The number one cause of accidents is when ***people aren't looking the right way***. In other words, they're ***distracted***. When you're distracted, whether it's by food, the radio, or an electric razor, you're not looking the right way, there's a good chance you'll get into a car accident.

For many people, the month of December can feel like a car accident. This whole month can be a disaster. Instead of a time of joy preparing to celebrate the Savior's birth, it becomes a time of frustration and depression. Instead of experiencing laughter, joy, and gladness, they experience crying, fighting and pain. Why is it, that for many people, Christmas time can be about as much fun as getting into a fender bender?

It's because many people aren't looking the right way. Lots of people are distracted from what Christmas, and what Christianity, are all about. As we'll see together today, if you're looking the right way, if you're focusing on the right things, Christmas can be a time of tremendous joy. Today we're going to see what that is, with the help of John the Baptist.

Last week through Mark's Gospel we met him, this camel's hair and leather-belt wearing prophet was living out in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey and baptizing people in the Jordan River. The Gospel of John that we have before us today describes John the Baptist this way, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him" (vv. 6-7) Do you see how John is described here? His purpose in life was to be a witness. His purpose in life was to testify. John the Baptist was a professional witness – but you wouldn't find him in any courtroom. Instead, he was out in the desert, by the Jordan River. And he testified or bore "witness about (that) light." John's job was to be a witness, testifying about the Light of the World, Jesus.

Last night I had the opportunity to play a small part in the story of the birth of our Lord Jesus. I got to portray one of the wisemen in the Glencoe living Nativity and Pastor Adelsen took over for me after an hour. This is the second

year I have been a part of this and in all the previous years that it has been put on while I've been here, I made sure to drive through the scenes at Oak Leaf Park myself. But in order to know which way to go and when it was my turn to go, there needed to be policemen, as well as volunteers, to point the right way to get the portrayal of Christ's birth. Their job is to stand there, with a glowing wand and to wave people in, so that no matter where you're from, you'll know how to get to the living nativity which lights up the dark winter night in Oak Leaf Park.

In many ways, that's what John the Baptist did. His job was to stand in the desert and point people toward the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. He didn't use a glowing wand. Instead, he used his words: "He was not the light but came to bear witness about the light" (v. 8) John's job was to point people to Jesus, the Light of the World.

But some people had questions. Some of the religious officials from Jerusalem came to John and asked him who he was. John told them, "I am not the Christ." "Then who are you," they asked. John told them that he wasn't Elijah, nor the long-awaited special prophet, nor anyone else that had come to mind for them. He told them, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" (v. 23). John never lost focus on who he was. He never lost focused on Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, the person he was supposed to witness about to others. He didn't let those people distract him or sidetrack him from his job: 'I am a witness. I testify concerning the light of the world.'

It's easy to become distracted during this time of the year. There's so much to do, so much to think about. There are so many hats to wear. There's the decorating hat - gotta get the tree up, get all the lights up. Then there's the shopping hat - gotta get gifts for all the people on my list. And hopefully find just the perfect gifts that will make everyone say, "That's wonderful! That's just what I wanted!" There's the socializing hat - gotta go to the different get-togethers, the different parties, scaled back as they may be this year. There's the family hat - gotta stay in touch with family, go to see them during the holidays. There's the catering hat - gotta get the perfect meal ready for everybody to eat on Christmas. And there's the working hat - gotta do my job, in spite of all the distractions of the holidays. Can you think of all the different hats you wear this time of the year? It can be overwhelming trying to balance all these different things. Sometimes, it feels like you're burned out, you feel really low, or you might even get angry.

And then, you realize that maybe, you've been looking the wrong way. You've become distracted. And maybe, that's why Christmas can sometimes be so difficult. That's why Christmas can sometimes be as much fun as a fender-bender car accident. There is one hat you can wear this time of the year, a hat that is more important than all the others, and that is the hat John the Baptist is wearing - the witnessing hat. In other words, focusing yourself and others on Jesus Christ. And when you let that hat be your top priority, your number one focus over and above all those other things - when you focus yourself and others on Jesus Christ, then everything else seems to fall into place.

Just as the policemen and volunteers stand there guiding the people on the right road and the right direction to take to get to the living nativity depicting the birth of Christ, so also you can be that person who points people to the Light of the World - Jesus Christ.

But what does it mean, to be a witness? Does that mean that from now until Christmas, your job is to go door to door, every night, testifying concerning the light? What does that mean? How does someone become a witness for Christ in our world today?

What it means, first of all, is living an openly Christian way of life in front of the people around you. At work, at school, wherever you are, if you're around people who are unchurched, unchristian, you are different. You're living an openly Christian way of life right in front of them. That means that you do what our Epistle reading talks about - you rejoice always. That doesn't mean you must always be happy, rather it means no matter what the circumstances you have joy given to you by the Holy Spirit and so you know God is in control and is working all things for the good of those who love Him. Our Epistle reading also talks about how by the same power of the Holy Spirit, you are a person of prayer, you are thankful in all circumstances. You are someone who is honest, sincere, loving, generous, and helpful. And you live this way openly, in front of other people.

That's what it means to be a witness; it's lifestyle witnessing. And none of it is fake. It's all sincere and it all comes from knowing who Jesus Christ is, and what He has done for you. As our Old Testament lesson reminds us this morning, Jesus Christ has released us from prison. He has turned our darkness to light. He became a human being in order to take away our sins. He is the reason God forgives you. He is the reason you can know without a doubt that your life matters. God loves you. He died and rose for you. He is the reason you can look forward to heaven.

The second part of being a witness is being willing to share your faith with others. That doesn't mean pinning someone against the wall and talking to them about Christ against their will. It means that, when there is an opportunity, you share what's in your heart. When someone says to you, "I always get so stressed out during the holidays. I can't wait till it's over. How do you keep it together?" Then you can be a witness and say, "What helps me, during Christmas, is remembering what's most important. I know that during my life I have made mistakes over and over again, and no matter how hard I try, I'm still making mistakes today. But I know that God became a man. That's what Christmas is all about. And even though I don't deserve it, He came down here to live and die for me, to wash all my sins, my mistakes away. I focus on that, and that's how I keep it all together when things get crazy this time of the year."

Be a witness for Christ this Christmas. You can do it by living a Christian way of life. And you can do it by sharing with others what Christmas is really all about. Don't let yourself get distracted this Christmas. Keep looking the right way. Be a witness no matter where you are. Perhaps, through you, someone will receive the greatest gift of all this Christmas, the gift of faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.