PATIENCE! Does any here have a problem with patience? Surely, at this time of year, everybody is impatient with everyone else. The kids are antsy just thinking about Christmas and what they hope will arrive under the tree for them on Christmas day. Parents are going crazy, putting up with the antsy kids, as well as worrying about all there is still left to do before Christmas arrives—shopping, decorating, cleaning, wrapping, cooking, baking—did I say baking—like in cookies? Even here at Church some of the staff is getting a little testy, what with weird requests from the pastor for the music ministry, and the like.

PATIENCE! A virtue, always in short supply, but especially at Christmas. I especially sympathize with teachers. Recently, a pre-school teacher had an incident that ended badly. This did not happen in our pre-school. I repeat—this did not happen in our Early Learning Center.

The teacher was helping a four year old student put on his cowboy boots. He asked for help and she could see why. Even with her pulling and him pushing, the little boots still didn’t want to go on. By the time the second boot was on, the teacher had worked up a sweat. She almost cried when the little boy said, “Teacher, they’re on the wrong feet.” She looked, and sure enough, they were. It wasn’t any easier pulling the boots off than it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as together they worked to get the boots back on, this time on the right feet. The little guy announced, “These aren’t my boots!” The teacher bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, “Why didn’t you say so?” like she wanted to. And, once again she struggled to help him pull his ill-fitting boots off his little feet. No sooner had they got the boots off and he said, “They’re my brother’s boots. My Mom made me wear them.”

Now she didn’t know if she should laugh or cry. But, she mustered up the grace and courage she had left to wrestle the boots on his feet again. Helping him into his coat, she asked, “Now, where are your mittens?” He said, “I stuffed ‘em in my boots.”

The teacher’s trial starts next month. While this didn’t happen in our Early Learning Center, the staff here has begun a Defense Fund for her, if you would like to contribute. They understand!

Our Gospel passage provides us with another example of the need for patience in John the Baptist. He has dedicated his whole life “preparing the way for the One who is to come”, the Messiah, the Holy One of God. Imprisoned, he knows his days are short. Soon, he will be executed. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the One. He’s wondering if he has lived his life in vain. Has his life been wasted? Has his mission failed?

Those of us who are trending downward in the years left to us can identify with that. Which of us, of a certain age, haven’t wondered if we are fulfilling or if we have fulfilled the purpose of our lives, the reason why God gave us life?

Jesus replies to John paraphrasing the prophecy of Isaiah: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.” Knowing that John will hear this as the job description, if you will, in the prophecy of Isaiah of the Messiah, Jesus assures John that He is the One.

In his admiration of John, Jesus proclaims, “…among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

I don’t know about you, but, if Jesus can say that of John who has doubts and fears as to his fulfilling the purpose of his life, just like us, it gives me great hope that my own life has infinite meaning.

The apostle James tells us today to “take as an example of hardship and patience…the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”

Just looking for a moment at the prophet Isaiah whom we read from today, it is worth noting that he served as a prophet to the people of God 700 years before Christ. The Jews had been at war against the Assyrians for 40 years, and, at times, they were fighting against the Egyptians too. Their will to resist their enemies was nearly gone. They were living through what has been called the first holocaust of the Jews.

Those forty years in which Isaiah lived and spoke to God’s people were devastating. Over and over again the Assyrians ravaged Israel. With no regard for anyone’s life or culture or religion, they came like a scorpion plague, devouring everything and everyone in their path. The horrid sounds of war were everywhere. The sounds of pain seldom ceased. Who could plant a field and have any hope that it would survive to the harvest? Who could bear a child with confidence that he or she would ever grow up?

All around him things appeared desolate and without promise. Yet Isaiah refused to give in to the despair of his time. He still managed to hope in God. He proclaimed the coming of the Messiah and the transformation of this world into the Kingdom of God.

Christmas is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s and all the prophecies of what we call the Old Testament. Two thousand years have passed since this prophecy has been fulfilled in the birth of Christ, our Savior, and our world with terror and wars raging all over the place doesn’t seem a whole lot better.

Why is that? Could it be because God had Jesus entrust His Kingdom into our hands—frail, weak, sinful human beings-- confident that we would eventually awaken to His Spirit whom he placed within our hearts, and make of this old world, the new world in which Jesus will reign as Lord of Lords and King of Kings and His Kingdom will reign forever.

Perhaps that is the greatest miracle of Christmas—not that we have faith in the God who has revealed Himself to us in Christ Jesus our Lord—but that He has infinite faith in and patience with us, trusting that one day we will get it right. On that day, in the words of Isaiah, we will be crowned with everlasting joy, we will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee. That’s what God awaits and wants for us with His infinite patience. Our Christmas celebration this year reminds us yet again that He hasn’t given up on us. He patiently waits for us to turn back to Him with all our heart.