

## The Second Sunday in Advent

### Text: Matthew 3:1-12 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea <sup>2</sup>and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” <sup>3</sup>This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” <sup>4</sup>John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. <sup>6</sup>Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>7</sup>But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup>Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup>And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup>The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup>“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

### Theme: Prepare the Way of the Lord

John the Baptist’s message to the people of Israel was, “*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.*” When we think of salvation, we often think of us leaving this “vale of tears” and going up to God. But Biblically salvation means that God comes down to us. He comes to save us, and on the last day He will bring the new heavens and the new earth. John’s voice called the people then and still calls us today to prepare the way of the Lord when He comes to save us.

I. There was a time when people were not prepared for the coming of the Lord.

That was when He came to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they sinned, It says in Genesis 3, “*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.*” After they did wrong, their first impulse was to hide. If you have ever had small children, you know that this is still our first impulse today. When we have done wrong, our first impulse is to cover it up and hide it, in the hope that no one will ever know. Then they were afraid. Adam told the Lord, “*I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.*” All of the other times that God came, they rejoiced in His presence. Now they were afraid. They knew that they had done wrong, and they were ashamed of it. But when God confronted them with their sin, the tone soon changed. They became defiant. Adam said, “*The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.*” Adam blamed Eve, but he especially blamed God. He basically told God that it was His fault for giving him a wife. If God had never given him Eve, this would have never happened. Then God turned to Eve, and asked what she did. She answered, “*The serpent deceive me, and I ate.*” She also claimed that it wasn’t her fault. The temptation was just too great. When we are not prepared for God’s coming, there is fear, denial, and a desire to blame someone else for our sins.

How did God respond? He promised them a Savior. He would send His Son to this world, born of

a woman, to redeem us from our sins.

## II. Now the Savior had arrived. Would God's people be prepared?

For 2,000 years the Jews had waited for the day when the son of Abraham and the Son of David would be born. They looked forward to the coming Savior, who would save God's people from their sins. John told the people in no uncertain terms, that the Savior was about to come. He proclaimed, "*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.*" God had come to be with His people. He had come to save them. Were they ready for His arrival?

People came from Jerusalem and all Judea to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. They confessed their sins and were baptized by him for the forgiveness of their sins. They wanted to be ready for the day when the Savior would come. But not everyone was ready. Pharisees and Sadducees came from Jerusalem. John accused them of hypocrisy. They looked holy and righteous on the outside, but there was no repentance. They were full of sin. John greeted them with the words, "*Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.*" Not everyone was ready when Jesus came to save us.

## III. Are we ready for Him today?

He still comes to us in the Gospel and in His Supper. Christ comes to us when we hear the Good News that He is our Savior. He has paid for all of our sins in full. He wants to give us the forgiveness of sins and a new birth as the children of God. When Jesus speaks about the sin of the Holy Spirit, it is when we hear the Gospel and are drawn to believe that Jesus is my Savior, but we reject that good news. What is our response when we heard the good news of Christmas that unto us is born a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord? Do we receive that Gospel in faith or do we reject it?

He also comes to us in His supper. When we receive the Lord's Supper, Jesus is giving us His body and blood which were given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Just as with the Gospel, we want to be prepared for the coming of the Lord in this Sacrament. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11, that those who are unprepared eat and drink judgement on themselves. How then to we prepare to receive the Lord's Supper? Paul writes in that chapter, that we are prepared when we examine ourselves through repentance and when we recognize the body and blood of the Lord in this Supper. Martin Luther put it this way in the Small Catechism,

*Who receives this sacrament worthily?*

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared, who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the word "for you" require all hearts to believe.

The question is whether we believe that Christ comes to us in this Sacrament in His body and blood with the forgiveness of our sins?

Christ will also return on the last day. That day will be the great day of salvation for His people, but the great day of judgement for those who reject Him. John said about that day, "*His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning*

*up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*” Will we be ready on that great day when Jesus returns to gather His people and give them the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness?

IV. The only way that we can be prepared for the coming of the Lord is through repentance.

John preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Repent means “to turn” or “to be converted.” It is a turning from our sin to the God who is coming to save us. When you consider John’s preaching, the message of the prophets who came before Him and the preaching of Jesus and the apostles, there are three distinct parts to repentance.

We confess our sins. This is called “contrition.” Unlike Adam and Eve after the fall into sin, we don’t deny, run away from or blame our sin on someone else. We confess it. Like King David we say, *“I have sinned against the Lord,”* with no if, and’s or but’s. We confess that we alone are responsible for our sins. One of our confessions says, “I have sinned by my own fault, my own fault, by my own most grievous fault.”

But we trust that Jesus came to forgive our sins. We trust that when Jesus died on the cross, He was bearing my sin too. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. It doesn’t matter how great or many our sins are, when we hear that good news of His payment for the sins of the world, we trust that all of our sins are forgiven too. This is the most important part of repentance, faith in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

Finally, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have the desire to do good works. John told the people, *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance...Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”* The fruit that our lives bear show whether we do believe that we are sinners who have been forgiven in Christ. Where there is no fruit, there is also no faith and no repentance. As Christians we cannot help but forgive and love each other as God in Christ has forgiven and loved us.

Jesus is coming. Are you ready? Are you prepared to hear the Gospel, to receive His Supper, and to welcome Him when He returns in glory? If you repent of your sins and trust that He came to save you, you will be ready. The repentance that John preached is what makes us prepared for the coming of the Lord. May God grant each one of us such repentance hearts.

Amen.

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