

2nd Sunday in Advent

December 9, 2018

Our Savior's Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Labuhn

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Have you been preparing for Christmas? It's hard for me to believe that it's already the 2nd Sunday in the season of Advent. The season of Advent only has four Sundays in it. Designed to prepare for Christ's coming and we only have two more Sundays, and a day left to prepare for the coming Christ-Child. That's right, 16 days from now will be Christmas Day.

If you're like me, while I've been thinking about the things that I need to get done, I really haven't bought any Christmas presents yet. But I see that most people have been busy preparing already. And thanks to the help of a small group of individuals, our church is decorated. I see that some people already have their Christmas trees up and they've decorated the outside of their homes. Kids have started to prepare for their Christmas programs. Some adults have already started hosting their Christmas parties. Maybe you've bought your Christmas presents already. It looks like many people have been busy preparing for Christmas this year.

But after reading our Gospel reading, I don't think that John the Baptist would agree with that statement. According to our Gospel reading for this morning, John the Baptist had a completely different way of preparing the way for Christ's coming. It wasn't about singing, parties or decorations. Instead, he made his way into all the region around the Jordan River, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In doing so, he fulfilled

Isaiah's prophecy, ***“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all the flesh shall see the salvation of God.”***

According to John the Baptist, the way to prepare for Christ's coming is by repentance – that is a turning away from our sin and asking God for forgiveness. He wasn't impressed by those who simply said that they were already right by God because he knew that repentance is more than having a change of heart or having a feeling of regret. It's more than relying on the faith of your relatives or simply going through the motions when someone of faith brings you along. Having more to do with the preparation of our hearts and minds, it's recalling the sin in your life, turning away from those sins, and turning to God asking Him for forgiveness.

This is a far cry from the way many prepare for Christmas today. And while some might say that was long ago, and John the Baptist was considered the last of the Old Testament prophets, many people didn't like to hear about repentance from John the Baptist, as they do even today. Yet, John was a prophet because God sent him to prepare people so that we might be ready for the coming Christ child. We read about him because he shares with us how God wants us to prepare for the coming Christ. He reminds us that we need to repent of our sins, because if there is no sense of sin and repentance in our lives, then there's no need for forgiveness and a Savior. And if we don't die to our sinful self-righteousness, we simply can't receive that new life that Christ comes to bring us at Christmas.

Christ will come again soon. He is the One whom John said is mightier than he, the strap of whose sandal he is not worthy to untie. Jesus is the ***“embodiment of the Good News that John proclaimed because salvation can only be found in Christ.”*** On the cross, Christ took on the judgment for all, so that in Him all might be forgiven. And while John Baptized with water for the

forgiveness of sins, John's baptism pointed to the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because Jesus comes to baptize with the Holy Spirit. He is coming with His winnowing fork in his hand, to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Today, we are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. This means that through repentance, we daily work to repent of our sins so that even our unhealthy desires are overcome. This enables good spiritual health to emerge so that we are prepared to live, grow, and have our being in the coming Christ Child. As this happens in our lives, the fruits of righteousness begin to appear as an outward manifestation of this spiritual health. When this happens in our lives, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control become evident in our lives. These are often the things that are needed most this time of the year.

To underscore the importance of this season of preparation, here's a video that's been prepared for you this morning.

While many of us might not be prepared for Christmas yet, there is still time to do so. Our church has a number of opportunities designed to help prepare your heart and mind for Christmas. For the next couple of weeks, our midweek Advent worship services are designed to help. There is a noon worship service designed for people who don't like to drive in the dark. There is a 5:30 pm worship service designed for families with children. You have the opportunity to do a craft before that service and afterward, there is a meal so that you don't have to cook on Wednesdays during this busy time of the year. And there is a midweek Advent worship service at 7:30 pm for those who need to relax after driving in rush hour traffic. All of these services are designed to help focus your attention on the real reason of the season – the coming of Jesus at Christmas.

If you're still unable to make one of our midweek worship services, still I pray that all of us might have someone like John the Baptist in our lives who may have the courage to be truthful with

us, who are actively helping to show us the sin in our lives so that we might repent of our own self-righteousness. In order for that to happen, we need to have ears that will hear, with repentant hearts, realizing our need for our Savior, so that we might be prepared to rejoice at the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and receive Eternal life He comes to bring.

In Jesus Name. Amen.