

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Advent 2C
December 5, 2021
Luke 3:1-14

Preparing the Way of the Lord

. . . the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:2-3 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Prepare the way of the Lord. That's the theme for Advent. For the entire season is about getting ready to receive our King who comes to save us. That's why John is so important. He was the prophet sent by God to call Israel to repentance in that particular place and that particular time. John was the fulfillment of the promise God had made to send a messenger, a forerunner, to get the people ready for the arrival of the Lord Himself. For it would be disastrous if the Lord would come and the people not be ready for Him.

While Malachi also spoke of John as the way-preparer, Luke cites Isaiah, "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 brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" Yet, that sounds like you'd need a road construction crew and equipment to do all that. But, of course, God is not talking about road construction. He's speaking of preparing people to receive Jesus, and to thus see the "salvation of God."

And how did John prepare the people? By preaching. And what did he preach? Listen again: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3.7-9).

That certainly doesn't sound very nice or appealing, does it? It's not happy clappy, or warm and fuzzy. It doesn't warm the cockles of your heart. In fact, it sounds rather frightening, judgmental, and harsh. John sounds almost angry, as though he is expressing God's anger and displeasure. And that's supposed to prepare the way of the Lord?

Absolutely! And that's exactly what we need to hear too. We need to hear the call to repentance, to turn from our sinful way, to turn from our idolatry and our trusting in ourselves, to turn from the ways of the world. We too need a wake-up call to rouse us from our

drowsiness, our complacency. For as in the days of John, we too have gone astray. We are sinful through and through, though we don't often realize it or acknowledge it. We often have wrong ideas about God and our relationship with Him. Perhaps it's thinking it's all about what we must do to please Him, and that we have actually done it. Or, since God loves us, we can do whatever we want. We are often loveless and mean-spirited toward others. We often think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. We are more concerned about our place and standing in this world and what the world thinks of us than our place and standing in the world to come and what God thinks of us. We often need that whack upside the head or two-by-four between our eyes to get our attention. And that's what John does for us. "Brood of vipers" is right.

And as those hearing John responded, "What then shall we do?", they showed that they took his words to heart. He had gotten their attention, and they weren't offended. They believed him. They knew he was right and that they were ripe for judgment. They knew they had not lived as God desired. But they didn't know what to do to change things. If the salvation of God was near, how were they to live? First of all, with faith toward God, that He forgives them and provides all that they need for this life. And then, show that faith in fervent love toward the neighbor.

Of course, there was more to what John proclaimed. For he also proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He proclaimed a washing which would work in them a new life through the forgiveness of sins. In his baptism, he pointed them to Jesus who would baptize them "with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

So, we see that Advent preparations are not about what we do, but rather what God has done and continues to do for us, to us, and in us. Advent preparations are not about some kind of self-improvement, as though we can straighten our own paths or smooth over the roughness of our own errors, mistakes, and sins so we can get to God, or somehow come to Christ. Rather, Advent preparations are all about our "King coming to us, righteous and having salvation." Advent preparations are all about God preparing us to see the "salvation of God." For the path that is being prepared is not for you to travel upon, but for the King to travel upon to you. It is His pathway to you to reveal to you His salvation - salvation from sin, from death, from the power of the devil, from your own sinful flesh.

That's why John went about "preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." And while the historic work of John the Baptizer was completed with the first Advent of our Lord Jesus in the flesh, the ministry of the Forerunner continues in the preaching of Law and Gospel and in Holy Baptism. Through God's messengers, His pastors, the Lord calls people of all nations to "see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). For in their preaching and baptizing, as in John's, God Himself turns you away from your sin and toward His overflowing forgiving grace. He works in you a wholehearted sorrow over your sins and a determination to turn away from them towards His grace and mercy. Through the Holy Gospel, the Holy Spirit changes your heart and mind through the gift of faith which directs your attention to King Jesus, crowned with thorns and enthroned on a cross. Through such preaching and baptizing you are directed to see the risen Lord Jesus seated at the right hand of His Father, where He ever reigns over the world,

and especially over and for the benefit of His beloved Bride, the Church. Through the “preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” our rough places are made straight and smooth and God removes our “self-righteousness, spiritual pride, the submission to the dictates of haughty reason, the love of sin in its various forms, unbelief and despair” (Arndt 109). And He fills our low places with His peace.

Yes, in your Baptism you received saving faith, and God worked repentance in you, because in that holy washing God forgave you all your sins. He literally took them all away. He completely removes every trespass and its guilt from your flesh. And while we don’t see this complete cleansing with our sin-darkened eyes, God gives us other ways in which He shows us His abundant grace to keep on removing our sins. The words of Baptism continue to have the power to forgive you, as they remove your sins in Holy Absolution.

Yes, my friends, the Kingdom of God is at hand. The King is coming, and such is our prayer. Faithful pastors continue to proclaim the forgiveness of sins as they herald Christ Jesus who came in the likeness of sinful flesh to become your sin so that you, in Him, may be forevermore the righteousness of God, and thus made worthy of life eternal. He even gives to you a foretaste of that heavenly feast in the Sacrament of the Altar, where the very body and blood of Jesus is given you to eat and drink as His New Testament to you of the forgiveness of your sins. Thus, God works in you true Advent preparations so that you will see your salvation now and forever. God grant it. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener