

December 5<sup>h</sup>, 2010  
 Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent  
 St Peter Lutheran Church  
 Bowie, TX  
 Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
 Matthew 3:1-12

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

<sup>1</sup> In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup> “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” <sup>3</sup> For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’ ” <sup>4</sup> Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not presume 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy 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 and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

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

As we progress into the Advent season, we make it no secret that we are getting ready for Christmas. But it is not just in the external things that we are getting ready. We are preparing our hearts. Getting ready in our frame of mind, to kneel at the manger and adore the Star of Bethlehem. God, eternal God come in flesh to live and walk among us. Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem came in the flesh for our salvation.

All of our Advent services should lead us to the virgin-born Child who came to save us. Today's Text about the manner of entering the Kingdom of God and this brings us to ask the question: How does man enter God's kingdom?

The answer was carried by the advance messenger of the kingdom. We have been looking at the manger, but let's jump forward roughly thirty years. The Star of Bethlehem has grown up and is beginning His work on earth. Before He began His public ministry, there was an announcement to be made.

John the Baptist was the God-called, God-ordained, and God-equipped man for the job. (Luke 3:2) John was directly called to the office of being the forerunner of Jesus in accordance with prophesy told to us in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3.

John also looked very much the prophet, from his dress to his dietary habits. He was clearly set apart and he was driven in his ministry, his humility,

but also directness and simplicity. John never pointed to himself; but always to the one that was coming.

Even the place that John began his ministry pointed to the message rather than the messenger. John didn't start out in Jerusalem, the temple nor the synagogue. He was the forerunner of Jesus; who was cast out and not welcome in these places.

John preached out in the wilderness, stony wastelands, which was a fitting symbol for the hearts of Israel. John preached out in the wilderness, in a place that did not have easy access; away from the hustle and bustle, a place to think, away from worldly things to listen to God. That's something that might do us all some good; heading into the wilderness, away from the glaring, noisy world to listen to the voice of God. Psalm 46:10.

So what does John say about entering into the Kingdom of God? Repent!

The prophet Isaiah speaking of his own time and foretelling John and his work, speaks of making "preparing the way of the Lord."

John says that the necessary condition is repentance. The way to enter God's kingdom is on bended knees. Cyndi and I were once at a meeting that was getting a little tense and one of the attendees made the comment that the reason that God made our knees so ugly was so that we might spend more time on them. A cute little saying, but according to John, we all have a reason to hit our knees in repentance. Scripture tells us in numerous places that we should be on bended knee in repentance with humility, confessing our unworthiness. (Gen 32:10, Luke 17:10, 1 Jn 1:8, Romans 3:9-12) Let's take a look at what Paul tells

us in Romans: <sup>10</sup> *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* (3:10-12, ESV, qt. Psalm ,14 & 53)

John knew what all men know. If they are honest with themselves, there is something wrong with mankind. We are spiritually ill and need a cure.

And that which always follows true repentance, is forgiveness. God doesn't leave us hanging, teasing us, dangling forgiveness like a carrot before our noses. As we repent, in Jesus name so are we forgiven.

Without repentance and forgiveness, no one can enter the Kingdom of God! You might say, well great! I repented and I am forgiven. Been there, done that, now I can go on my merry way...well not so fast. John continues in verses 8-9, saying "<sup>8</sup> *Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not presume 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*".

I would have loved to hear John preach. He comes simply and to the point; hurling thunderbolts at the people as he points them to a better way. Here it is! Repent, be baptized and then he lowers the boom with one little sentence: bear fruit in keeping with repentance. OK, we can't just get by with saying I'm sorry, if we are really repentant, then it will show in our actions.

Notice the order of things here. Repentance, then forgiveness and then action. Some get those things out of order. Thinking that God won't forgiven them until they do some act of penance or good work. But that is just not so.

We are convicted by the Law and repent. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we call upon our Savior, Jesus Christ and are forgiven! The fruit of that repentance and forgiveness shows up afterwards. Sort of like a garden. The Law breaks up the packed earth of our hearts. The Gospel proclaimed waters it and the Holy Spirit fertilizes it to that faith in the Christ as your Savior takes root. THEN, the fruit is produced. Not a perfect example, but hopefully you get the point.

John the Baptist's cry is for us, even today. The cry for repentance does not sound so joyous. In a time of year when Jingle Bells and Joy to the World are the songs of the day, a call to repentance almost seems out of place. But as John came to prepare the way of the Lord, so too is repentance the preparation for rejoicing. There can be no permanent joy, no unending joy, until we find it in God's kingdom. And John tells us how to enter it. Repent! Repentance precedes forgiveness.

There is nothing "feel good" about repentance. But dear friends in Christ; there is nothing more joyous than the forgiveness found in Christ Jesus and no more joy can be found than in the fruits that follow.

As you have repented and confessed your sins this morning and heard the absolution spoken, know that you are indeed forgiven. Go forth today in the joy of that forgiveness and look for further joy as the fruits of repentance present themselves to you.

Amen.

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

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria