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## **The Second Sunday in Advent**

**December 10, 2023**

**Come, Lord Jesus  
His Coming Brings a Call to Prepare**

Jesus comes to us every year at Christmas. Jesus comes to us every time we hear his Word and receive his sacraments. Jesus comes to us at the end of time on his Day of Judgment. So much commotion and so many distractions—not only in this season but in every season— take our eyes off Jesus' coming. John the Baptizer calls us to prepare for Jesus by turning away from sin and listening to his loving voice. The Bible calls these actions repentance. The Advent call is: Repent!

**Sermon  
Mark 1:1-8**

**The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:**

**I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way—  
a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.**

**And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

Introduction – The men of the Seminary Chorus—and that includes our three seminary students—are getting ready for today's Christmas concerts on seminary hill. There was a long dress rehearsal last night and a live rehearsal last Wednesday at Loving Shepherd Church. Then there were three rehearsals every week for three months. There were robes to hand out and music to select and a program to design. I remember what it's like to prepare for seminary Christmas concerts. Been there; done that.

We always invited people to our home after the concerts, and we still do. So we've been preparing for the party. The tree is decorated and the food is made and the wine is chilling. It's Tiefel family Christmas on Saturday and the presents are bought (thank you Amazon) and they're all wrapped. Then it's Christmas services to prepare and sermons to write. Well, you all know how this works. The Ladies Group got into the preparation thing on Wednesday with all kinds of presents and games. We don't all get ready the same way, but we all prepare for Christmas.

So does everybody. Christmas used to start after Thanksgiving, but now it starts after Halloween and everybody gets ready. Advertisers shout out Christmas sales, work crews hang Christmas lights, Santa Claus appears on TV commercials. The party invitations arrive and the family gatherings get planned. We all get into this. In our own way we all prepare for Christmas. All good; no complaints from this pulpit.

You've heard enough sermons by this time in your life to know what's coming next. The preacher is going to urge you not to forget to prepare for Jesus. It happens every year on John the Baptist Sunday, the Second Sunday in Advent. John the Baptist—some of us call him John the Baptizer—is the voice crying in the wilderness, **Prepare the way for the Lord.** There is nothing new here, nothing you haven't heard before. But there is something important here, something we need to hear again and again. We are up to our eyeballs with Christmas preparations. We need to remember and we want to remember that Jesus is the center of Christmas. Really Jesus is the center of life. So whether it's Christmas or the Fourth of July, whether it's cold outside or hot, whether we're lighting Christmas trees or fireworks,

### **Let's Be Sure to Prepare for Jesus**

We remember John the Baptist at Christmastime, but John 's story isn't really connected to Christmas. He was born by the time Jesus was born—six months older—but he didn't start preaching until Jesus started to preach and that was 30 years later. John didn't come to prepare people for Jesus' birth but to prepare people for Jesus' ministry. So when Mark sat down and wrote the first sentence of his Gospel—**The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God**—he started with John the Baptist. The other Gospel writers do exactly the same. That tells us that John's message is bigger than Christmas. Whenever and however we interact with Jesus, John's message is absolutely vital.

Old Testament believers knew about John, not by name but by assignment. Both Isaiah and Malachi identified a messenger who would get the people ready to receive Jesus. We heard Isaiah in the First Reading: **A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord.** And that's where John appeared—in the wilderness. The wilderness west of the Jordan River was a wasteland. Think of the surface of the moon if you've seen pictures. Nobody lived in the wilderness except for a few hermits and holy men. And John became a wilderness man. **He wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.**

John didn't preach in the wilderness because he was a rustic or a redneck. He preached in the wilderness because he was preaching to people who lived in the wilderness, the devil's wilderness. The searing heat of sin was beating down on them, the sandstorms of guilt were blowing around them, and the wild animals of fear were attacking them. There were no breezes, no water, no shelter, and there was no way out. They were crawling and creeping in a desert of death.

We know this wilderness; we've been there. We don't talk about it much; Lutherans get pretty used to hearing about forgiveness and grace and peace. But think what your life would be like if there were no forgiveness or grace or peace; No Bible, no gospel, no baptism, no Holy Communion, no Jesus. You know people right here in Mequon who live in that kind of wilderness. They may not admit it or even worry about it, but they feel the heat and the storms and the wild animals. We know what they're going through because we've taken trips to the wilderness, times when sin blinds us and guilt smashes us and fear consumes us. Preparing for Jesus includes remembering the wilderness: the desert we deserve and the wasteland we've experienced. John preached in the wilderness and he preached to people who lived in the wilderness and is still preaching to us today.

John was a sensation in Israel: **The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.** To some people he was a joke or a villain. But to others he was exactly what they needed and wanted. They listened and they were loyal. But John knew his place and his purpose. He was forerunner; he was the advance man. **This was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

John said much more than that; Mark is summarizing here. John pointed to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John preached about the true light who gives light to everyone. John proclaimed a righteous judge who will destroy those who oppose him and save those who trust him. John preached about a Savior who sends his Holy Spirit to open eyes and change hearts and create faith. With that baptism of the Spirit we can live with God in confidence now and reign with God in glory forever.

When we think about preparing for Jesus, we need to stop and realize what we actually have in Jesus. There is more to Jesus than a stable and swaddling clothes. This is **the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God**: With his words and his works he picks us up and carries us out of the wilderness of the devil. He takes the threat out of our sinning, he takes the fear out of our dying, he takes the doubt out of our believing. Jesus has a plan for each of us and that gives our lives a purpose. He puts a smile on our faces even where there are tears in our eyes. He backs up our prayers with his promises. He leads us to love him and to help one another. He moves us to share him with our family and friends. He guides us to volunteer willingly and to give generously. There is nothing good in life that doesn't come from Jesus. There is nothing bad in life that Jesus can't overcome. John preached that message in the wilderness and he is still preaching that message to us today.

So we frost the cookies and hang the ornaments and buy the presents. We know how to prepare for Christmas. So how do we prepare for Jesus? John knew what Isaiah wrote and he knew what Isaiah meant: **In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.** Our city workers can't seem to remove the orange street cones even though the roadwork on Mequon Road is done. You and I need to be different; our cones need to come down. We need to get rid of the barriers that slow Jesus down. We need to push our sinful habits off the roadway. We need to keep our eyes off the distractions of temptations. We need to steer clear of the potholes of pride and pleasure and procrastination and prejudice. Jesus has carted us out of the wilderness and now we need to keep our eyes only on the garden of his grace. The Bible calls this repentance: we turn away from what we had before and turn toward what we have now. That's exactly what John preached and exactly what the people did: They confessed their sins and were baptized for cleansing and forgiveness. That's what John preaches to us and that's how we prepare for Jesus.

Let's be sure to prepare for Jesus this Christmas. Get rid of second-rate priorities and focus your attention on the eternal Word who became flesh and lived among us to die and rise to take away our sins. Let's be sure to prepare for Jesus every day. Put away the idea that Word and sacrament are options in our lives and focus instead on the power that keeps our faith alive and strong. Let's be sure to prepare for Jesus who is coming again at the end of time. Drown your disinterest if that's your particular sin. Get rid of your fears if that's what plagues you. Focus instead on the Savior who will take us to the glories of heaven. And then we won't have to prepare for Jesus ever again because we will be with Jesus, face to face, forever. Amen.

*This sermon was preached by Pastor James Tiefel.*