

**Weekend of Sunday, December 7, 2019**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year A**  
**Primary Text: Matthew 3:1-12**  
**Sermon Title: "Light of Peace"**

**Theme**

*Just before Jesus begins his public ministry, John the Baptist appears, calling people to mend their ways and speaking of a powerful one who is to come.*

**Text**

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,  
<sup>2</sup>"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>3</sup>This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.'"

<sup>4</sup>Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, <sup>6</sup>and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup>But when he saw many 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 worthy of repentance. <sup>9</sup>Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup>Even now the ax is lying at 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 one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

## Sermon

Advent is considered a season of preparation. Preparation for what or whom depends on who and what you are.

If I ask almost any child under the age of ten, “Who are you getting ready for?” there would be no delay in the answer; “Santa Claus!” they shout with great enthusiasm.

If I ask their parents what they look forward to they might answer, “The excitement and joy of their children at the wonder of Christmas morning.”

My children no longer live in my home, though Aaron will come home for several days from Oklahoma City. But I suspect that there will be plenty of Christmas morning excitement at my grandson Elliott's home.

This Sunday we are supposed to be celebrating the "Light of Peace." We sang about it earlier as we lighted the Second candle on our Advent Wreath. I even titled this sermon, "Light of Peace" but you might think that peace isn't easy to find in the Gospel Reading for today. But that also depends on who or what you are looking for and who and what you are.

For hundreds of years since the prophet Isaiah first began prophesying the coming of a God's Messiah, the Jews had been looking forward to something, but just as in our day, who and what one was, determined who and what they were getting ready for.

What they got first was John, John the Baptizer. And as you heard from the prophet Isaiah this morning, what they were to expect was something unusual. John the Baptizer filled the bill. John was eccentric at best and downright weird and socially inappropriate at worse. Is there any wonder why he stayed out on the borders of society and let people come to him?

And come to him they did. God in God's wisdom created John with certain idiosyncrasies and I think those idiosyncrasies worked at making him a spectacle that drew people from miles around. John was the best show in town!

And John's message was that they, the Jews (and anyone else whom John convicted with his message) were at a pivotal moment in history. In verse two, Matthew wrote, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven *has* come near." They are living it, it is happening!

That must have been confusing to his listeners. When? How will we know? What can we expect? Who should we be getting ready for?

If they were sincere in faith and action their lives would have changed, but who they expected was not who they got.

The great German theologian Karl Barth called the times we live in presently, "the in between times." I am fond of calling this season, Second Advent but we are both saying the same thing.

The times in which we live are after the First Advent, that time in which John preached. God's Messiah did in fact come as the little baby Jesus born in Bethlehem under the great star. That event is worthy of our celebration because it was the first step in working out the salvation of human kind. Jesus would live his life as an example of Godly living and then give his life for the forgiveness of sins therefore opening the way to eternal life for those who accept this grace in faith.

But after he resurrected, the glorified Jesus told his disciples that he would return and that return would usher the end of the age. And that is what we are waiting for. That is the Second Advent which we celebrate in great anticipation. So you see we are living in what Barth called "the in between times."

So, "who are you getting ready for?" Maybe its friends and relatives – that is okay. That is how we celebrate this holy season. But amid the festivities and brightly colored packages, egg nog and caroling, we need to be mindful of the times in which we live. Santa Claus may be coming to town, but Jesus is returning to earth. And that means that this gig will be up and life eternal with God, perfect communion with the holy and all the saints of every time and place, and a return to Eden is just around the corner. Jesus Christ is the Light of Peace, and when he completes the Kingdom of God, peace will abound.

**Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

So why do we need Advent, a season of preparation? Since the return didn't happen as soon as many thought, and in fact we are still waiting, the church has come to understand that Christians need to set aside regular times of the year to consider again the full significance of what God has done in Jesus Christ. But sadly, popular culture and the marketing machine that makes this country great have kidnapped the real meaning of Christmas for many. But it shall not be that way for you, not on my watch. You know that Advent is not just the four weeks preceding Christmas, not just the Christmas shopping season. It is a season of preparation. A season to hear from our old friend John the Baptizer, who in dramatic fashion, encourages us to remain sincere in faith and action, and therefore be ready when Jesus returns.

Although this text can inspire awe and maybe even fear in some, we need to remember that it is not our action that is important (as important as it may be) but rather God's desire to realign us according to Christ's life. "Repent!" John cried out. But repentance is not so much about our guilt feelings as about God's power to transform us into Christ's image. And the more we do that, the more peace we will find.

So "prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." For the Lord is coming. Peace be with you all this Second Advent season.

## **Prayer**

Loving and merciful God, you not only sent your son Jesus Christ into the world to demonstrate godly living to your creation, but you sent John to warn of his coming. At his ascension Jesus promised to return and gather the faithful to live with you and the Holy Spirit for eternity.

Now, in this *in-between time*, some 2000 years later, we are tempted at every moment to replace a long absent Jesus with gods of our own making. Forgive us and send us your Holy Spirit to draw us back to you, and redirect us during this season of preparation that we might be found faithful and ready. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen