

2nd Sunday in Advent
December 8, 2024
Pastor Jasper Sellnow



Theme: Prepared for the Lord by the Lord
Text: **Luke 3:1-6**

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—² during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.
⁵ Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
⁶ And all people will see God’s salvation.’ ”

God’s Word that we’ll consider today is the Gospel from Luke chapter 3.

We pray: *For you, O Lord, my soul in stillness waits, truly my hope is in you. Amen.*

Preparation can be a lot of work. I know this time of year many of you may be preparing for some extra things as Christmas draws near. Gatherings with family or at work or here at church all require a little extra preparation. Getting gifts and writing Christmas cards means preparing for some extra hours spent at the store or the post office. Or maybe you are preparing for another difficult time of year. Holidays spent with little to celebrate from an earthly perspective. Maybe you are preparing to face off again with depression, or drinking, or financial distress. Maybe you have to prepare yourself to face your family again even though you know it will be tense and awkward. And some of you have so many other things to prepare for that the extra preparations for Christmas don’t even make it on your radar. Preparing for more time with the doctor. Preparing for a difficult move. Preparing to somehow keep it together for one more week at a job that is sucking the life from you, or a home life that brings more sadness than joy.

Yes, preparation can be a lot of work. Which is why in this season of Advent at church what a refreshing thing it is to hear about a different kind of preparation. We get to hear today and next week from John the Baptist who cries out with words of preparation. And in God’s Word before us today we are reminded that to be prepared for the Lord is not just another thing to add to our

long list this December... instead we are prepared for the Lord by the very Words he proclaims and the promises he keeps.

The Word he proclaims in our Gospel reading today starts in a rather interesting way. You notice St. Luke does not tell us that the events of our text happened *“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...”* He does not say, *“Once upon a time there was a man named John...”* No, he records an actual event from human history and backs it up with names of real rulers from history that can be verified.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. (Luke 3:1-2)

What an amazing couple of verses. All these men listed demonstrate that the events that took place in the Bible happened in a real time and place. Nearly 2,000 years ago the men listed here were some of the most important men in the world... at least some of them were. Tiberius Caesar was the ruler of the mighty Roman Empire. Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor placed in charge of the province of Judea with its capital Jerusalem. Herod the tetrarch, the son of Herod the Great from Jesus' infancy, is governing the northern part of Israel in Galilee. And you also notice the powerful religious rulers of the Jews mentioned – Annas and Caiaphas... men who would one day condemn Jesus to death.

But you know what... none of these men, as powerful and well-known as they were in their time, none of them are the main character here. That would be John, the son of priest named Zechariah. Which is really rather remarkable when you think about it. John would rise up on the scene at this time... but would be dead in just a matter of years (at the hands of Herod the tetrarch no less). And men like Tiberius, and Pilate, and Herod, and Annas and Caiaphas would still be living and ruling and working out their political power plays long after John died... even after Jesus died and rose and returned to heaven. So why is John, son of Zechariah, the most important man listed in these verses?

Well, it's not because of anything in John... rather, it's because of a message given to John to proclaim. **The word of God came to John...** And what was this word? This message from God?

[John] went into the whole region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:3)

John came with water and the Word to turn people from sin to the forgiveness God gives. And this message, while always so necessary, was truly timely because Jesus the Savior was just about to make his public appearance. And John would have the privilege of pointing people directly to him as the solution for their sin. But before Jesus took the stage, John spent a little time preparing them. But don't think of John like a warm-up act at a concert or comedy show... he wasn't just killing time for the audience while the main act got ready... John's work was critical because he was there

to make sure the people were ready for the main act... ready for Jesus. John came to prepare the way.

In fact, that's just what God had long been planning. Centuries before John was preaching and preparing people to meet the Savior, God had announced that such a messenger would come. The prophet Malachi recorded God's promise about John saying: **Look! I am sending my messenger! He will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord, whom you are seeking, will come to his temple! (Malachi 3:1)** And Luke of course records words even more ancient than Malachi's telling us that John's ministry was: **Just as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: A voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be made low. The crooked will become straight, and the rough ways smooth. And everyone will see the salvation of God." (Luke 3:4-6)**

You see God knew that in order to be ready to meet Jesus there was work of preparation that would need to be done first. But thankfully God did not add this burden to our list. He did the work himself. He sent the messenger. He gave him the message. The Lord worked through his Word spoken by John to prepare the hearts of those who heard. And the Lord is still doing that today.

He sees you and me and how totally unprepared we are to meet Jesus on our own. He sees how we not only aren't ready for Jesus at Christmas but are woefully unprepared to meet Jesus as Judge when he returns. Yes, he sees the truth about our natural state. Our sinful nature. A nature which peeks out in our lives daily. God sees the mismanaged time. He sees the misplaced priorities. He watches as you ignore his Word in your life. He is not blind to your sinful anger or bitterness. He is not ignorant of your sexual sins outside of marriage. The lies you tell, the substances you abuse, the people you hurt – none of this is lost on him. He sees a people unprepared... and he meets them with words of healing that do the work of preparation we could never do.

You are forgiven. Not because you deserve it, but because God is gracious. Not because you've been faithful, but because God is. You are forgiven. All your sins forgotten by the Lord we so often forget. All your sins removed by the Savior John the Baptist came to point us to. Jesus paid sin's wages with his blood shed on the cross. Jesus took your life of failure and gifted you his life of holiness. Every valley of sin has been filled in with the good works of Jesus done in your place. Every mountain of sin has been torn down and cast away from God's remembrance. Every crooked path you've taken in life, the Lord Jesus has straightened into a highway for his love and healing to meet you and restore you. Every rough road of rebellion, doubt, or despair has been smoothed out by the perfect peace Jesus gives to sinners who have been called to faith in him.

Prepare! Repent! These are not your works at Advent or ever. These are God's works. You are prepared for the Lord by the Lord. And because Jesus has made the path level and straight, he will not hesitate to walk into your heart today with his forgiveness and peace no matter what that path might have looked like this past week. And Jesus will continually march into your heart of faith because it will continue to be prepared by the Word of God for his arrival and his residency.

Brothers and sisters. You are prepared for the Lord. And God's Word will continue to keep you prepared whenever it is heard by you... and as you hear it, it will continue to bring about the

humble and repentant life of faith that God desires – a truth we'll consider more closely next week... but for today simply remember this: Preparation can be a lot of work. But thankfully the preparation you need most will always be done for you by your gracious God. Amen.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless in the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all time, now, and to all eternity. Amen. (Jude 24-25)