

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ,

Messages to evacuate went out this past week in southern California to homeowners and residents. Fires were threatening life and property. For a time, winds reached the 70 miles per hour range. It is hard to imagine receiving a message to evacuate and leaving behind precious possessions unless you have been in that situation.

Residents of the Valley of the Sun receive a different kind of warning message in the summer months. When the monsoon rains come, we warned by the Department of Public Safety to stay out of washes and flooded areas. Yet there are always some who don't listen and we see one or two stranded as we watch the evening news. It is more serious than that. Once in a while a person drowns in those flood waters after getting caught in them.

Today we have a message not from the Department of Public Safety, but we could call it the Department of Spiritual Safety and Salvation. The Lord's spokesman, John the Baptist, comes to tell us to prepare for the Coming of the Lord. His message gives us peace as we await Christmas. That same message gives us peace as we wait for Jesus' Second Coming. John has a good news message for you today. **Listen to God's Advent Preacher.**

John the Baptist was the miracle baby born to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age. The angel Gabriel, the Lord's messenger, had told Zechariah of John's coming and he also stated that John would prepare people for the coming of the Savior. In Mark 1 John is now an adult and he is living in the desert of Judea. People were coming many miles to listen to him preach. They were spiritually hungry and wanted good news.

1. He is sent by the Lord. Vs. 2-4

When preachers get up and preach today, their job is to explain what God has revealed in his message. They also apply the word to our lives. At important moments in salvation history the Lord would send a prophet or messenger to reveal that he was about to act. This was John the Baptist's role. He was sent by the Lord to prepare the people's hearts because the arrival of the Savior was at hand.

A. The Evangelist Mark leaves no doubt about John's unique role. He starts

his Gospel by quoting the prophet Isaiah. A special messenger would prepare the way of the Lord. His job was to prepare the people for the coming of the Savior.

You know that when a US President comes to town, messengers appear ahead of time to prepare the city for the arrival. There are special arrangements with traffic and highways. There are special preparations of stages and microphones and of course meals. They make everything is just right so the President can move in and move out smoothly.

B. What preparations was John overseeing? Isaiah tells us that he was to **“prepare the way.”** However, he was not to make material or logistical preparations. John was to prepare people for Jesus’ ministry and his work. John’s work was preparing their hearts to receive him as Savior.

Isaiah describes John’s work as **“making straight paths.”** We are told by Mark that he preached **“a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** The idea is that sin makes our hearts crooked. What kind of sin? Our hearts can have mountain of selfish pride. We are told in Proverbs 8:13, **“I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.”** Our hearts can also have valleys of worry and fear. In Matthew 6 Jesus commands, **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.”** (25) These hearts are not a fit for the Savior King.

We are told, **“so John came preaching a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** Preachers sometimes struggle to tell people they are sinners. They ask, *“What if people don’t like it and don’t come to hear my preaching?”* A pastor might conclude, *“I won’t have a congregation.”* God sent John to do this. He still send preachers today to preach the Law of God. The Law of God in the Bible condemns our pride and selfishness. It brings down the mountain. It also rebukes us for worrying. The Law moves us to say, *“I have done wrong. Help me!”* That is what John the Baptist’s audience did.

John had good news for the people. John the Baptist would tell people that the Savior was coming to take away their sins. He would win salvation. And all who believed received this forgiveness and salvation. The people were Baptized and thus were reassured that they had God’s grace in the coming Savior.

The Lord sends preachers today to prepare our hearts for Christmas and for

Christ's return. Messengers of the Lord are not only going to speak glad tidings of peace and joy. They are going to call attention to your sins and mine. They are going to tell us that our hearts are crooked. We need to repent of our pride and our worrying. Those same messengers will sooth our hearts with the promise of forgiveness of all sins in Jesus, the Christ. We need to listen to God's Advent preachers.

2. He points to Christ. Vs. 1,7-8

We heard in this past Reformation season that Martin Luther wrote hundreds of sermons. It is likely that John the Baptist had many different messages that he preached. The Lord God gives preachers a lot to talk about. At the center of all his preaching was Christ. He pointed people to Jesus Christ.

A. St. Mark gives us a summary of John's description of the Savior. **"After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

John was a great prophet, but the Savior would be greater. St. Mark tells us in verse 1 that Jesus is the Son God. The writer to the Hebrew Christians tells us that Jesus is **"the exact representation of the Father."** (1:3) He is equal to God, the Father. John the Baptist was merely an instrument. Jesus is the key to God's plan of salvation.

B. St. Mark points to Jesus' work when he tells us that Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. Jesus sends God, the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see what Jesus has done for us.

1. Right after this account we have the report that Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for forty days. We are told especially in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus turned away the temptations. He never gave into one of them. He was without sin.

2. Later Mark reports the innocent suffering death of Jesus. He was crucified by the Romans and then after three days Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus conquered sin and death and he earned the forgiveness of sins for us. It is Mark who writes Jesus words, **"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."** (16:16)

Trans: Did Advent preacher's message help people? Mark tells us that it did!

3. His message changes hearts. Vs. 5

John the Baptist's preaching changed hearts. God's word is powerful.

A. St. Mark reports, **"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."**

We hear that many people came to John. We aren't told his style was what drew them. There was a longing and a spiritual hunger and John was able to address that. He showed them their sins and forgiveness in Christ. Churches that do this will ultimately reach people and help them.

B. The Advent preaching also changed people's lives. We are told John was different in verse 6, **"John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey."** John lived a humble and repentant lifestyle. We can believe that the people who were moved by his message were changed in the way they lived life. They were living humbly for God.

C. There are many people today who are tired of the outward trappings of the season. The special foods, music and decorations add to the season, but they don't make the season. Your Christmas is great when you see the baby lying in the major and remember that God has saved you for time and eternity. Christmas is great when we remember we are tied to Jesus for time and eternity through our Baptism.

There aren't enough Advent preachers like John. Pray that there are more and you join in sharing Jesus as the Savior who makes Christmas special. You may not end up with a crowd in front of you like John, but if people know you are a devout Christian, they will ask about your joy and peace. Conclusion: I started out by mentioning that some Californians are getting important messages about the fires in southern California. We get helpful messages during the monsoon season.

Today remember that we are to listen to God's Advent preacher. The Advent preacher shows us our sin and shows us our Savior. It prepares us for Christmas Day and Judgement Day. Rejoice and thank God that he cares to send his messengers. Help pass the message along. Amen.

The First Lesson—Isaiah 40:1-11

1 Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

3 A voice of one calling:
“In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

6 A voice says, “Cry out.”
And I said, “What shall I cry?”

“All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

7 The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever.”

9 You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,

lift it up, do not be afraid;

say to the towns of Judah,

“Here is your God!”

10 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.

See, his reward is with him,

and his recompense accompanies him.

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd:

He gathers the lambs in his arms

and carries them close to his heart;

he gently leads those that have young.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (page 97 in the hymnal)

The Second Lesson—2 Peter 3:8-14

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise

we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Verse of the Day

Alleluia. Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. All mankind will see God's salvation. Alleluia. (Luke 3:4,6)

The Gospel – Mark 1:1-8

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way”—

3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”

4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 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. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 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. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”