

Second Sunday in Advent
Luke 3:1–20

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Luke 3:1-20.

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, while Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea, while Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee, while his brother Philip was the tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and while Lysanias was the tetrarch of Abilene, **2** and at the time when Annas and Caiaphas were the chief priests, the Word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. **3** He went into all the country around the Jordan and preached that people should repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins. **4** It was as Scripture has said in the book of the Words of the prophet Isaiah: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord! Make His paths straight! **5** Every ravine will be filled in. Every mountain and hill will be levelled. The crooked roads will be made straight and the rough roads smooth, **6** and all people will see the salvation of God.’”

7 Therefore John kept saying to the crowds who were coming out to be baptised by him, “You brood of poisonous snakes, who has warned you to run away from the coming wrath?”

8 Therefore produce fruits worthy of repentance! Do not begin to tell yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father!’ For I tell you that God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. **9** The axe has been already laid at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

10 The crowds used to ask him, “Therefore what are we to do?”

11 He used to answer them, “The person who has two tunics should share with the person who has none, and the person who has food should do the same!”

12 Tax-collectors also came to be baptised, and asked him, “Teacher, what are we to do?”

13 He told them, “Stop collecting any more money than what has been laid down for you!”

14 Soldiers also used to ask him, “What are we also to do?”

He told them, “Do not extort money by violence, do not accuse people falsely, and be satisfied with your wages!” **15** The people were expecting something and were all wondering in their hearts whether John might perhaps be the Christ. **16** John answered them all: “I am baptising you with water. However, the One who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie His sandal-strap. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. **17** He has His winnowing fork in His hand to clean up His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn the chaff with fire that cannot be put out.”

18 So with many other words John kept exhorting the people and telling them the Good News.

19 However, when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, **20** Herod added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

As I said last week, we have just begun year “C” in the three year lectionary in this season of Advent. While we don’t completely avoid readings from the other gospel accounts, the Gospel According to Luke provides the majority of the readings we will hear this year.

One of the things about Luke’s Gospel that you don’t really notice unless someone tells you about it is, the harmony and balance of Luke’s Gospel. Luke begins with the account of Zechariah serving in the temple. It ends with the disciples in the temple. The next event is the descent of the Son of God into the womb of the virgin. The second last event in Luke’s Gospel is the ascent of the Son of God back into heaven. In today’s reading from the Gospel account, we heard that **John the Baptist went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** (Luke 3:3)

On the day of resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and said to them, **“46 He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day; 47 and on the basis of His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’ (Luke 24:46–47) So we have Zechariah in the temple matching the disciples in the temple; the descent of the Son of God matching the ascent of the Son of God; AND a proclamation of baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins matching the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins.**

There are many reasons for this harmony and balance, but one of the reasons is that neither John nor Jesus invent anything new in their teachings. Both John and Jesus locate their authority in the writings of Holy Scripture. This is especially interesting in Jesus’ case since Jesus actually is God and could base His teaching on His own power and authority. Never the less, Jesus constantly based His teachings on the Holy Scriptures using phrases such as **“Have you not read,” and “It is written”** on a regular basis.

John’s authority comes straight out of the prophet Isaiah where it is written, **“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”** (Luke 3:4) John’s calling is the calling of preparation. He is to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. AND, as our Lord instructed His apostles after He rose from the dead, preparation begins in repentance.

The Augsburg confession describes repentance in this way.

Now, strictly speaking, repentance consists of two parts. 4 One part is contrition, that is, terrors striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. 5 The other part is faith, which is born of the Gospel [Romans 10:17] or the Absolution and believes that for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven. It comforts the conscience and delivers it from terror. 6 Then good works are bound to follow, which are the fruit of repentance [Galatians 5:22–23]. (AC: I, art. xii, par. 3–6)

Before repentance, a human being makes his way through life fairly well pleased with himself. He may not think of himself as perfect, but he believes he is not that bad. There are certainly people in this world who are way worse than he is. He figures that the good outweighs the bad and he will be OK in the end. Such a person is in denial of his true status before God.

John the Baptist had a rather startling way of shocking people out of their complacent self-deception. He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, **“You brood of vipers!”** This condemnation borrows from the account of the fall of Adam and Eve where the devil appeared as a serpent. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, **“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”** (Genesis 3:1) By calling them a brood of vipers, John the Baptist was calling them children of the devil.

He then continued his warning by saying, **“Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”** With these words, John was basically warning them that, if nothing changed, they were destined for the eternal punishment of hell.

Although today’s text does not describe the reactions to this condemnation, John’s next words give us a clue. He said, **“Do not begin to tell yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’! For I tell you that God can raise children for Abraham from these stones.”** Apparently, some in the crowd objected to John’s condemnation by saying something like, “You can’t talk to me that way. I am a circumcised child of Abraham. I’ve got rights. I find your remarks offensive.” John informed such folks that there is no claim to salvation based on biology ... even if you are descended from Abraham.

The proper preparation for the coming judgment is repentance. John said, **“Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.”** Acknowledge your sin. Admit that you have earned both temporal and eternal punishment. Confess that you would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. Admit that you would remain under the power of your father the devil if it were not for the promise of God to send the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One to come and rescue you.

John’s judgment is still valid today. We still suffer from the sin passed on to us down through the generations from Adam himself. The Word of God still teaches us that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own. We are still lost forever unless

delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation. As we said earlier in the service, we are poor, miserable sinners who have offended God and earned both temporal and eternal punishment.

We live in the days after the Christ came to save us from the condemnation of sin, but, at this time of year, we try to imagine what it was like for the Old Testament Christians to look forward to the fulfillment of God's promise of a Saviour. Today's text tells us that the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John. By the power of the Holy Spirit some people responded to John's warning with an eager desire for the coming of the Christ. Some people even wondered if John himself might be the Christ.

John answered them all, saying, **"I am baptising you with water. However, the One who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie His sandal-strap. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."** John made it clear that He was not the Christ. He also made it clear that the Christ was coming soon.

John also pointed out the difference between His baptism and the baptism of the Christ who is to come. John baptized with water in preparation for the coming of the Christ. Jesus participated in that baptism and then went forward to His own bloody baptism on the cross. When John baptized Him, the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove. When He hung on that cross, He endured the fire of God's wrath against our sin. He has undergone this baptism of water, Spirit, blood, and fire as a substitute for us all.

Those who have received Holy Baptism like we saw in the Baptism of Dakota May, according to Christ's command become joined to Christ as the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write, **"Or do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life. 5 If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with Him, that our sinful bodies might be rendered powerless, in order that we might not be slaves to sin any longer."** (Romans 6:3-6) Through baptism, we are united to Christ. God considers us baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire. Christ has taken our sins away and replaced them with His righteousness.

During the season of Advent, we think of Christ's three comings. Christ has already come to take away our sins. Repentance was the way to prepare for that coming. Christ has yet to come in order to judge the living and the dead on the Last Day. Repentance is also the way to prepare for that coming. Christ comes to us now as we hear His word and take His body and blood into our mouths. We repent and receive the forgiveness that Jesus earned for us with His baptism of blood and fire on the cross. Repentance prepares us for His coming. **Amen**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Church Second Sunday in Advent

P Let us come before the throne of God's grace and present our petitions with confidence in the Spirit through our Lord Jesus to His heavenly Father, for He is kind and full of compassion.

Brief Silence,

P Heavenly King, it is because You do not change that Your people are not consumed, for Your steadfast love is everlasting. Remember all who have been baptized into the name of Your Son and grant them grace to lead lives of holy fear, filled with the fruit of repentance and faith. Lord, in Your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

P God of our salvation, remember our pastors, teachers, and servants of our Church. Strengthen each one to hold forth faithfully the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. We pray for labourers for the harvest. Instill in the men of our congregations a love and a receptive heart for Your name, so that from their number You might raise up some to serve as Pastors to Your flock. Grant all our congregations to increase and abound in love for one another and for all, so that the schemes of the evil one may come to nothing. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Only Just One, we commend to you all who hold offices of public trust throughout our land. Grant them to fulfill their callings impartially, remembering always that they shall give account to the Lord Jesus on the day of His glorious appearing. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Father in great love You sent St. John the Baptist to call all to lives of repentance, that they might welcome Your Son and His kingdom. Give Your people grace in these Advent days to open their hearts and hands to all in need, expressing in their deeds the faith of their heart. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Lord, Your apostle, St. Paul, taught us that we may be sure that You will bring to completion the good work You have begun in us. In such confidence we commend to Your merciful hands all who are sick and suffering, grieving or lonely, [*especially* _____]. Sustain their faith and provide them comfort until they stand whole and filled with glory before Your throne. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Holy One, because we in ourselves could not abide the Day of Your coming in judgment, Your Son gave up His body and blood for our forgiveness and now gives it to us as the very righteousness by which we may stand before You without shame. Stir up in Your children faith to receive His coming to us in the Eucharist with joy. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P O God and Father, Your Son is the destruction of death and the very gift of life everlasting. Receive now our thanks for all who have fallen asleep with faith in Him and bring us to share with them the Day without evening in Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P These things and whatever else You know us to need, most Holy Father, grant us for the sake of Him who will return in glory to judge the living and the dead and who now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.