

God's Gift of Repentance Prepares for His Coming

2nd Sun. in Advent – 12/07/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 3:1-12 Pastor Keith Besel

[Three times John the Baptizer speaks of the importance of repentance:]

v. 2, **“All of you repent, for the reign/rule of heaven has come near.”**

v.8, **“Therefore, all of you bear fruit worthy of repentance.”**

v.11, **“I am baptizing you all in water into repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I am, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; He will baptize all of you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”**

Introduction

✘ Christmas shopping, Christmas baking, Christmas decorating, Christmas traveling. Are you ready for all of those? Semester finals, semester papers, semester break. Students, are you ready? Year-end filings, year-end closings, year-end contributions. Are you ready?

➔ It's all coming – ready or not!

✘ Far more important than all of that is what we are all to be about here in Christ's Church right now in this season of Advent; this season of “coming”.

➔ It's the same thing that John the Baptizer was about almost 2000 years ago. Christ coming, judgment coming, repentance calling, repentance and faith-filled living. Are you prepared?

I. Are you prepared for what, exactly? (vv.1–2).

✘ What exactly is it that John the Baptizer wants the people of his day, and all of us here in our day, to be prepared for? It's not about all of the things that most of us are concerned about right now; not about those things that our culture or the commercial world or even our friends and family and teachers and employers are usually expecting us to focus our attention upon here in early December.

➔ No, what John desires most for you and me to be ready for is the one thing that really matters most; the one truth that God Himself has promised is currently coming now!

✘ It's what he proclaims in verse two, literally in the original Greek, that “the reign/rule of heaven has come near.” It's already come. The fact that God's rule over each and every soul in His Creation is right now in place; John – and every faithful pastor and every Christian after him should have as our primary purpose in this life, that is to make sure each and every soul that we come into contact with is fully aware that the one true God in heaven is now come to earth, to reign and to rule among us – for our good; for our salvation!

➔ This coming of God's rule has two aspects; two equally important facets: He has come, and He is coming both in grace and judgment – grace, because God is lovingly saving His people from their sins, and judgment, because those who reject His free and saving gift; that is the gift of His Son, Jesus are, by their own choice of unbelief, therefore judged to eternal separation from God. Jesus says in John 3:18, “Whoever believes in [Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

✘ This is the One to whom John the Baptizer points everyone that comes to him; the One John announces “is coming” after him; the One who will establish the reign/rule of God once and for all. You see, the reign and rule of heaven; of God is a person; one person – Jesus, the promised Christ. He has come in the flesh, in a manger in Bethlehem. And He is reigning and ruling among us now and forever!

→ This kingdom; this reign of God is like a mustard seed that grows. It's among us anywhere and everywhere that the Gospel is preached and the sacraments that Jesus gave to us are administered faithfully and received in faith. He has planted it among us and within us for the very purpose that it grow and grow as more people receive God's gracious gift of faith and live in that faith as His people.

- ✘ I quoted Luther's explanation to the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer last week, but it warrants another quote. When we pray, "Thy kingdom come", what does that mean? Luther says, "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."

→ So His kingdom comes to me and to you at the moment of our conversion; as soon as the Holy Spirit fills us with faith, then He is reigning and ruling within your heart and soul.

- ✘ Equally important, this rule of God is still coming, and will find its ultimate fulfillment in the second coming of Jesus; when God will do away with all evil and create the new heaven and the new earth that He has promised for our eternal life. As Revelation 22:20 teaches all Christians to eagerly desire, so we earnestly seek for and pray: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

II. Are you made ready by John? (vv. 3–4).

- ✘ But are you ready for the coming of Jesus? This was the reason that God sent His preacher, John the Baptizer; to prepare people for His coming reign. God called His messenger to teach and tell us that there is a specific way to be prepared.

→ You see, John was the preacher that Isaiah prophesied would come to perform that preparatory work. Verse three, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'"

→ And now look, there's John, wearing "a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; eating locusts and wild honey" (v.4) out "in the wilderness of Judea" (v. 1). Though all of that sounds kind of "out there" to you and me, his garments and diet were not all that exotic for the nomads of that region.

- ✘ Still John was nowhere near the aristocrat, richly dressed leaders of the Jewish church in their day; those who preached what people wanted to hear in order to make a living and fit the expectations of higher society.
- ✘ John is not even preaching in the city, at the temple. No, he's preaching outside the city walls at the Jordan River – approximately 10-15 miles to the east.

→ So the people were taking a full-day's journey one way, to come to the Jordan to hear what John had to preach and to be baptized; quite a contrast to the way so many people balk at and complain today at the idea of spending only 1 or 2 hours of time in God's Word and receiving His Divine Service gifts.

III. Are you ready by repentance (vv. 5–10)?

- ✘ Once they come to John, how did John the Baptizer prepare them for the rule/reign of God? He gives them an imperative, "All of you repent, for the reign/rule of heaven has come near" (v.2).

→ So, repentance, this is how God intends souls to prepare for His rule in their lives.

- ✘ But this isn't what most people think of; and sadly not how they are often taught to think about the concept of repentance. Scripture is crystal clear – repentance is not something that any of us can just conjure up and do on our own. It is 100% a gift from God.

→ He is the one that comes to sinful souls to redeem us. Because we sin-born souls, by nature don't think we need to repent. We've bought into the lie of the devil as he proclaims it through

the world that we are all just fine with God as we are. Somehow we've missed the logical step that a perfect and holy God cannot remain perfect and holy once He comes into contact with a corrupt and sinful people. So, we sinners, by nature are not ready for God, nor can we ever, in our imperfect state, do anything to make ourselves holy and acceptable to God.

- ✘ The only way that can happen is that God has to be the one that takes the initiative to prepare and purify our souls. Salvation has to come from Him, even when these sin-soaked souls don't want a God who saves us.

➔ That's why God sent someone like John to show us the reality of our situation; the fact that we are the ones who have gone astray; we have defied God; we have ignored God; we are not, by ourselves, ready to receive Him.

- ✘ That's John the Baptizer's purpose, to be God's instrument to prepare us for His reign/rule through Baptism. He may be called John the Baptizer, but first he preached and he proclaimed God's law regarding our sinful nature. Then John baptized.

➔ But we need to understand, John's baptism was not the same as our Christian baptism today. Jesus had not yet instituted Christian baptism. Remember, He was the One who was still "coming", according to verse 11, at the time that John was baptizing. Neither was John's baptism the same as the ritual washings in the Old Testament, because those were to be performed over and over as people washed themselves.

➔ But John's Baptism was to happen only once, and by him. This was important, because John was preparing people for the baptism to come; where people would then receive what baptism gives, instead of doing it for themselves. None of us can "do" repentance, it must be given. Neither can we forgive our own sins, it must be given and received purely and only by the grace of God.

- ✘ But some refused God's preparatory gift. The Sadducees and Pharisees, like many today, they came for the wrong reason. Theirs was not a pure or honest repentance. They believed they could actually keep God's Law to perfection; that they needed nothing but their bloodline back to Father Abraham, though they entirely missed Abraham's own example of humble repentance and faith.

➔ As John told them in verse eight, "All of you bear fruit worthy of repentance." You see, repentance is more than just saying the words, "I'm sorry." It is turning away from sin and receiving God in faith; having our souls cleansed by His forgiving power. When this happens, that soul then naturally bears the fruit of the Christian life; striving by the Spirit to do what God wants us to do.

➔ If somebody instead continues a life that defies the will of God, this is a sign that the repentance is not genuine, but fake. So John calls out all those who have a fake repentance; urging them to a truly humble and submissive repentance before God.

IV. Are you prepared for Jesus?

- ✘ Now, I know that we are all separated from John by 2000+ years. But friends, his message and call is equally meant for us today. So, are you truly sorry for the sins Jesus comes to forgive?

➔ You see, repentance is not something that Christians ever complete on this side of heaven. God is still coming to you with His undeserved, life-giving gifts every day. He grants you His gift of repentance and He calls you to humbly receive it; to acknowledge your sin – all of it and then confess that sin openly to Jesus. It's then that He showers you with His forgiving victory earned at the cross and the empty tomb. And it is the daily life of every true believer in Christ; for the rest of our earthly lives.

➔ And yes, we must always pray for the Lord to keep us from the danger that we get so used to this life of repentance that we just go through the motions and become insincere or that we end up like the Pharisees and Sadducees and think that we no longer need to repent because we've become that good of a believer.

- ⌘ Instead, we pray for the Lord to keep our eyes always focused upon Jesus, the “author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2); the one who now has come to objectively prepare us for His reign when He died on the cross, and who still comes to subjectively prepare each one of us in faith for His reign/rule in our lives. He does it when He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit one time only into the one Holy Christian faith.

➔ So, my dear Christians, you are made ready for the coming of Jesus – today and when He comes again. His gift of repentance prepares you every day for Jesus; for the life He has ready for you to live here in His Church; out there in the world as His witness; and into eternity upon the final day of His glorious return.

Conclusion

- ⌘ That is far more important than all of our shopping, baking, decorating, tests and papers, and making sure that we finish the year in the black.

➔ Yes, far better than all of the stressing and scurrying, because this preparing that we have in Jesus is simply about receiving, living and believing what He has already done for me and for you and for everyone on this earth. To Him be all the glory. Amen.