

# Matthew 3:1-12

Advent 2, Supplement Series A, December 4, 2016

Theme: Prepare to meet the mighty King

I. Baptism brings faith and forgiveness II. Baptism produces good fruit  
INJ John the Baptist is one of the important people we talk about during the Advent season. He was a colorful figure. Can't you see him dressed in clothing made of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist? What would it be like to eat locusts and wild honey? John did his teaching and preaching in the wilderness away from Jerusalem, near the Jordan River, and crowds came out to see him.

John is called "the Baptist." Did you ever wonder why we call him a Baptist and not a Lutheran? I think you probably know that we are not identifying John with any modern denomination. John was not Lutheran or Baptist or Catholic. What John did was baptize people. So we call him John the Baptizer, the Baptist. Today we will talk about the baptism of John and how it relates to our baptism and our life of faith. John has a message for us today, and it is just as urgent as it was then: Prepare to meet the mighty King!

John must have had an interesting personality. He spoke his mind in ways that most people didn't. He did not try to minimize the reaction he got. He said what was true and necessary. Among the leaders in Jerusalem, he was feared and despised, but the regular people came to him in droves. John was an outsider. He was polarizing. He was bold. It is tempting to draw parallels to modern personalities, but John had something none of our famous figures have. John proclaimed God's Word. As the forerunner, he was sent to prepare the way for the coming Savior.

So John preached. He was tasked with what the prophet Isaiah foretold: "A voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight." We don't necessarily have to reconstruct roads so that important people can travel, but that happened in ancient times. Kings wanted straight paths, without dangerous stretches. What is left of a forerunner's job today might be how law enforcement secures the perimeter around a famous person. They enter a facility before the celebrity arrives to check things out. People who will interact directly might have a

background check done. Can you imagine what kind of security would be put in place if Jesus were the celebrity?

That is what John is talking about when he says, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near!" Straighten the paths. Fill in the potholes in your heart. Get rid of the bad habits and rebellious ways. Stop the sin. Do the good. Jesus is on his way! When he comes to your place, what will he find?

Even a cursory look around our hearts shows crookedness, secrecy, rebellion. Even when we try to sweep things under the rug, there still remains pride and jealousy and anger and lust. What needs to happen is radical change in our hearts. We need to put away the deeds of darkness. We need to turn away from the wickedness. Bite our tongues so we don't say what is harmful. Stop letting our minds wander and dedicate ourselves fully to the Lord and to his Word. Jesus is coming! Prepare to meet the mighty King.

Crowds came to John at his preaching station by the Jordan River. They arrived from Jerusalem, they walked from the closer towns and villages, and they even came from miles away. They heard a powerful message of repentance: Turn away from sin!

John would not be an Advent attention-getter if he only pointed out our sin. We wouldn't benefit from his fire and brimstone message because we cannot stop our minds from wandering. We cannot evade temptation and avoid sin. We are crooked and corrupt and spiritually deviant, and we have no ability to stop ourselves.

John is the Baptizer, though. He tells us that God comes to restore peace with us. God's peace comes in surprising ways, but without it we will not be ready to meet the mighty King. You can tell something about God's peace by looking at John. Camel's hair and locusts? This guy is not about image and appearance and slick advertising. Instead there is humility. Honesty. Directness.

What we need is the power of God to work on our hearts like it worked on John. What we need is hatred of sin. And forgiveness for what we have done. We need God to change our hearts, giving us good desires and intentions. How will we get these things that make us ready to meet King Jesus?

We get them from Jesus himself. John proclaimed the message of forgiveness in God's anointed one, the "Lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world.” John called people to baptism, where God did the miracle of making faith and applying forgiveness. Those crowds that gathered were filled with God’s power by water connected with God’s Word. We have been baptized “ in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We have the same power of God. In baptism, God brought you peace. He forgave your sin and gave you faith.

Your baptism makes you ready to meet King Jesus. Your baptism has meaning each day as you do the same as the crowds around John the Baptizer. Confessing your sin, you acknowledge your need for a Savior. Trusting the word of God, you believe that Jesus is your Savior. God washes away your sins. He straightens the path of your heart. You are his own dear child, baptized into his name!

John the Baptist was a popular man. So much so that not only did the people come to be baptized by him, also the religious leaders showed up. Were the Pharisees there to observe John and assess how much of a threat he could be to their way of life? Did the Sadducees come to be baptized, identifying with the crowds while not really confessing their sin or trusting Jesus? Either way, John called them out. He wants us to know that baptism is not just for show. It is not merely a ritual to perform and forget about. Baptism produces good fruit. It makes us prepared to meet the mighty King.

“ You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit in keeping with repentance!” The Pharisees and Sadducees could see that John the Baptist spoke powerfully. What they weren’t anticipating was to be personally addressed. Why are you at John’s baptism? Are you doing this for real, or for appearances? Do you really believe it or not?

God always confronts us personally. Remember the long reading from Daniel today? King Nebuchadnezzar felt he could do and say anything he wanted, because he was the king. God humbled him and he finally recognized a mightier King. The Pharisees didn’t think they had to change their sinful ways because they had impeccable heritage as descendants of Abraham. We can have the same pride as King Nebuchadnezzar. We make the same excuses as the Pharisees. “I have been a member of this congregation for years!”

God humbles us, exposing our arrogance. Why are you here,

if it is not to repent of your sin and plead for mercy? Are you simply going through the motions? Is your Christian faith merely a thoughtless habit? John thunders again: “ Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near!” Prepare to meet the mighty King.

King Jesus came, not in powerful wrath to destroy all opposition, but instead, in humility, to reconcile sinners to himself. Jesus perfectly accomplished every detail you failed to do. He became the sacrifice that paid for your guilt. In baptism, Jesus entered your heart. It is personal. He took away all your guilt. He clothed you in his own righteousness. He gave you a new heart that loves him and seeks to praise and glorify him.

You live in that baptism now. Baptism means daily repentance. It produces fruit, too: Not doing what is wrong. Determined to do right. Listening to God’s Word and following it. As God’s child, you live in humility and genuine faith that bears fruit.

I know we all struggle with the fruit. Like Pharisees, we make excuses and put on airs. Like Nebuchadnezzars, we strut about in our pride. We live in a sinful world and with a sinful heart, and life gets messy and confusing. God calls us back to our baptism. Remember his promises! You have peace. He gives you the power to bear fruit.

John lifts our eyes to the coming of that mightier King, Jesus. When he comes on the Last Day it will not be in humility and lowliness. All our struggles with sin will be over. Then, Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The Holy Spirit will take all believers to heaven, and fire will fall on the unrepentant, the fakers, the idolaters. The tree without good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. The useless chaff will be burned.

Prepare to meet the mighty King! Which are you? Fruitful tree or firewood? Go back to God’s promise to you in baptism. You have been cleansed by Christ, and you are forgiven. You have a new heart of faith that produces fruits of faith. Look at what your God has done: the path has been made straight for the coming of the King!

The Advent season at church tends to get lost in the shopping, decorating, partying and eating. John the Baptizer wakes us up with his intense and personal message. The mighty King is coming again; prepare to meet him! Baptized into his name, you are ready. Hearing his words, you bear much fruit until he comes again. SDG Amen.