

***Second Sunday in Advent – December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024***  
***PREPARING THE WAY***

***Prayer***

Jesus, we thank you that John was sent to announce your incarnation, and we ask that, through the Holy Spirit, you would make us your ambassadors to the world to announce your second coming in Glory.

AMEN

***Preparing the Way***

Have any of you been to an event where the President was going to speak? I had that opportunity at one of the scout jamborees I attended and can tell you there is lots of preparation.

I'm sure there was lots of preparation months before the Jamboree, but the day of the event is when you really saw all the action. All the 40-foot containers on the property – used to keep program materials safe and dry – had to be unlocked, inspected, and kept open. There were at least 3 or 4 sharpshooters positioned on the zip line platforms high above the venue. All of the audience had to be in the venue a couple of hours early, having to pass through metal detectors and not even being able to take our own water (they did provide water). The band had been practicing *Hail to the Chief* for several days, but sadly never got to

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perform it, as there was a more perfectly performed recording available for use. Even once we saw Air Force One coming in for the landing at a nearby military base, it was half an hour before we saw that first of the dozen vehicle motorcade on the road that skirted the venue.

### ***Christ's First Coming***

In contrast, Jesus needed just one guy to tell everyone that He was coming. John recognized Jesus while still in his mother's womb (Luke 1:40-43):

*[Mary] entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

In his ministry, John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi that is the basis for today's sermon. He was that messenger who was (v 3) *to prepare the way*, not for Jesus's birth, but for His ministry.

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### **PREPARING THE WAY**

As the final prophet of the Old Testament, John the Baptist proclaimed the law and coming judgement for sinners, as foretold by Malachi (V 5):

*I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.*

As well as proclaiming God's promise of redemption (v 6)

*"I am the LORD, and I do not change. . . . Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies*

Even though the Israelites were unfaithful, God remained and remains faithful; He reminds us that He **WILL** keep the promises He made to Abram, to David, and even to you and me regarding the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

And as recorded in the Gospel lesson (Luke 3:3)

*[John] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

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***Christ's Second Coming***

This baptism is the same as proclaimed by Peter (Acts 2:38):

*And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*

And the baptism that we recalled at the start of the service – where, by water and the word, God used these ordinary means to call you to Himself, adopt you as His child, and elect you to salvation and eternal life in Christ.

And I, like John, have been called by God through you to be your messenger, to proclaim both God laws – something that God requires of us – and God's Gospel – something that God gives to us as an unmerited gift. I do so in the public worship for the sake of good order.

But I am NOT the only one who can tell you about the person and work of Jesus!

As I've mentioned in the past several weeks, (Phil 3:20)

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*our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior,  
the Lord Jesus Christ,*

and even more than just citizens, (2 Cor 5:20):

*we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through  
us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

We, like John the Baptist, are messengers preparing the way for Christ. John prepared the way for the Jesus' Earthly ministry, while we prepare the way for the triumphal return at the end of the age. We, like John, must proclaim both God's Law and His Gospel to a world that calls evil good, dismissing the idea of the spiritual in favor of the material, and in doing so, only increases their need for true meaning, relationship, and authenticity that can only be filled by their creator and savior.

I would urge you, therefore, to have open ears and a loosened tongue during the Advent season, when we are waiting to celebrate the birth of the Christ child, the incarnate creator of the universe. It doesn't have to be hard, let me give you an example:

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This past week, a member was relating the story of how neighbor had asked about our Advent by Candlelight Program, what it was and why we were having an event. This led to an opportunity to share about Jesus and to Join Him on His Mission. Remember that we should

*always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,*

And in doing so, we just might help our neighbor to turn away – repent – of the materialism of Christmas and focus on the real reason for the season.

AMEN