

Sermon Series B Advent 2 2020 Mark 1:1-8 Be Prepared

Mark 1:1-8

1 *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

2 *As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,*

*“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,*

3 *the voice of one crying in the wilderness:*

*‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”*

4 *John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can't have Advent without John the Baptizer. Every year at this time we hear about John. The time is right to hear about him because he is the one who was sent as the forerunner of Jesus. Jesus speaks very highly of John. As we seek to be prepared for the celebration of the holy days of Christmas, its good to put John at the top of our list right up there with the tree, decorations, and cookies.

John stands out from the crowd. He is dressed differently than others and the food he eats is unusual. John wore a coat of camel's hair and wore a leather belt. Why? Because such dressed identified him as a prophet. Prophets of the Old Testament developed a tradition of wearing hairy clothing. The leather belt is a feature especially connected with the prophet Elijah. Thus, even with his clothes, John embodied the fulfillment of the prophecy that the voice of Elijah would call in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord. John ate grasshoppers. Grasshoppers actually fall under the category of “clean” food that God allowed Israel to eat. John continued to be faithful to the dietary laws handed down through Moses. He also ate wild honey. This can also be significant because Israel ate honey when they were in the wilderness, and God described the promised land as a land “flowing with milk and honey.” In this wild honey we harken back to the time when God sojourned with his people in the wilderness and we are reminded of the remarkable promises of a special dwelling for his people.

Where was John preaching? He was working in the area of the Jordan river. This is also picture language. The Jordan is where Israel crossed from the wilderness into the promised land. By locating himself at the Jordan, John was saying there was another Jordan-crossing type event about to happen. This time, the promise was elevated from entrance into the land of Canaan to entrance into the new creation at the end of the age – the “final” promised land, we might say.

In verse 2 of our text it says John was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. How? The answer to this question is mission-critical. Was John supposed to be a fulfillment of some prophecies of God? Yes. Was John supposed to remind everyone about the Word of God? Yes. Was John there to instruct his hearers to live moral lives and be good people? Yes. However, none of these would ever be enough to prepare

the way of the Lord. The answer to the question of how John would prepare the way is found in the primary act he is famous for – baptism. John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When those who gathered at the banks of the Jordan underwent John’s baptism, they received the washing away of their sins and in doing so prepared the way for the coming of Jesus the Messiah!

That leads us into the next section. John said that there was someone else who would come after him who was mightier than himself. This person, of course, is Jesus - the one whose way John prepared. But in what ways is Jesus mightier than John? There are several ways this is true. First, here’s a prophecy about Jesus from the Old Testament:

Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; Isaiah 40:10

The prophet Isaiah gives a picture of the Messiah who was to come as a mighty warrior. Indeed, Jesus is the mighty One sent to do battle with our old evil foe, namely Satan. Jesus took every accusation, judgement and sentence that could every be directed against us. It killed him. The Father abandoned him as he would all those who have evil. But on Sunday morning Jesus overcame the power of sin and death. He rose victorious over the grave. We will no longer be judged because of the impurities in our souls. Now all who are found in him will rise to eternal blessed life. In this way, Jesus is much, much greater than John

John also makes a comparison between the baptism he administers and the baptism of Jesus. John says he baptizes with water, but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Is there a real difference between John’s baptism and Jesus’? Yes. The difference is quite profound. Notice how John proclaims a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Now think about what happened when John baptized Jesus. Something extraordinary happened that did not happen at any of the other countless baptisms John had performed. When John baptized Jesus, the sky opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove. This is how John knew for sure that Jesus was the promised Messiah. When you have Jesus, you also have the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Jesus makes an adjustment to the baptism formula as he gives his final instructions to his disciples. Jesus said from that point on the disciples should baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Peter speaks to the effect of this baptism “upgrade” when addressing the Pentecost crowd. He says, “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.” Hmmm. Notice the difference between John’s baptism claim and Peter’s. John claims his baptism bestows the forgiveness of sins. After Jesus won his battle with Satan, Peter claims baptism gives the forgiveness of sins AND the Holy Spirit. Big difference? You bet!

It’s good to know that the best way to prepare for Christmas during this time of Advent is to return to our baptismal waters. Imagine yourself standing right next to Jesus at his baptism. John is there dressed in Elijah’s clothes as the embodiment of the prophecies concerning Christ and connecting and confirming the Old with the New. The Holy Spirit descends upon us, bestowing the blessings of Jesus’ victory and leading us into a life of faith and obedience. Through the waters of the Jordan in which you stand all God’s people enter into the promised land.

God bless you as you prepare for the Word made flesh this Christmas and as you are prepared by him for his final appearing. Amen.

Ron Breight, Pastor
Christ Lutheran Church
400 Barclay Avenue
Forest Hills, PA

Sunday bulletins and sermons available online at christlutheranfh.org
Service video recordings on YouTube – Christ Lutheran Forest Hills PA