

## Sunday Sermon and Liturgy for ADVENT TWO, December 6, 2020

**Sentence:** Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. All flesh shall see the salvation of God. ( Luke 3: 4,6)

**Collect:**

**Almighty God who sent your servant John the Baptist to prepare your people to welcome the Messiah, inspire us, the ministers and stewards of your truth, to turn our disobedient hearts to you that when the Christ shall come again to be our judge, we may stand with confidence before his glory; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.**

**For those who have an advent wreath at home, I offer the following Candle Lighting liturgy - One reader will do, but two is more fun.**



**Reader:** ( *Light the first candle* ) This candle of HOPE reminds us that Christ will come again, He will come down again to save us, and make our whole world well. On this second Sunday of Advent we will light the candle of PEACE, and consider the how we both find and make peace with God, peace with one another, and peace amongst all peoples.

**Second Reader:** The prophet Isaiah wrote, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” And John, the messenger of God, proclaimed to all the people who came to him in the wilderness that they must repent of their sins and be baptized. Many people heard his message, repented, and were baptized in the river Jordan.

**Priest:** (*Light the 2<sup>nd</sup> candle – the Candle of Peace*)As this second candle, lit in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, now glows, we listen again to the

pattern of John's message. We ask God's Spirit to open our hearts to simplicity, truth, and generosity so that no one who wants to welcome the Lord finds the road too high, or the path too difficult to find. When we find ourselves on paths that do not lead to the Saviour, we make a u-turn and go the other way...we find a moment, all alone or all together to renew our own baptismal vows ...and in the brave spirit of John, may we even find the words "**Happy Saviour's Day**" upon our lips, that it may be perfectly clear just Who it is we await, and Who it is we welcome!

**ALL: COME, LORD JESUS. AMEN.**

### **Readings for Advent Two**

**Isaiah 40: 1-4      ( Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13                      2 Peter 3: 8-15a)**

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. <sup>5</sup>

### **The Holy Gospel: Mark 1: 1-8**

**The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

<sup>2</sup>**As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,**

**"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;**

<sup>3</sup>**the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:**

**'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight,'"**

<sup>4</sup>**John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were**

baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

### Sermon:

I just love the Advent Season. It is a time where we look for **new** things, where we **get excited** about something, where we don't merely look **back at the wonderful birth of Christ but look forward to God's plans for our world** and for our own lives. It should be exciting!

When I was a child, Christmas was just the most exciting thing that came along every year. The very best moment of Christmas was the two or three minutes that five tiny children stood at the top of the hall stairs, while Mom and Dad went down to check that Santa Claus had come and was finished with his work. We sure didn't want to frighten him away. Somehow Mom and Dad always had a coffee cup in hand when we were given the OK to scamper down the stairs and into the glow of the tree lights, now shining on piles of surprises. For us! Or more specifically, for me! Do you remember feeling like that? **Wasn't it wonderful?** Just as it is wonderful to recreate the moment for our own children and grandchildren.

**John the Baptist had a day like that once.** A day when he stood poised over the future and made a huge decision. You see, John was excited. He'd heard from his parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, that the Messiah would come. He'd read it in the Holy Scriptures of the People of Israel. He'd seen the signs of His coming appear before his very eyes. He had a wild and crazy hunch that it had something to do with his cousin Jesus. **How and why and when...**that he didn't quite know, but he knew life was about to **change forever.** And John got **excited.** Excited enough that he ran straight out of his parent's home, straight into the desert and began telling everyone who'd listen that they'd better get ready,

because the great day was at hand. John's excitement moved him to very courageous action.

I'm sure it wasn't easy leaving home. I'm sure it wasn't easy getting used to wearing rough, tough **dirty clothing** after all of Elizabeth's gentle sewing and laundering. I'm sure it wasn't easy getting used to **eating locusts** and honey instead of lamb, bread and herbs. I'm very sure it wasn't easy putting up with being teased and **laughed at**. But John did it. He was **driven by a passionate dream**, a great vision of peace and restoration, and he did what he could to help people prepare for a new day.

Our **God** is also moved with a great passion. A wonderful vision. An exciting goal. This is what it is. Our good, our completion, our joy, our healing, our eternal life. Everything in creation being one with Jesus. In unity. Forever. And it isn't easy. **It cost everything**, even His Son. But God is about it. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the King and the Shepherd. God works through us to create a world in which **peace and righteousness kiss each other**, in **which truth and mercy** stand hand in hand. A place where vengeance, greed, abuse of power, and hatred no longer exist. **It will have to be a new world. His Word promises that it will be a new world.** In a time of which we have no knowledge, but also in a time which may, indeed, be our own.

The question for us is exactly the same question that Peter posed to the Churches in today's reading; **"How then should we live?"** ( Given God's plan, given our place in it, how are we to live?

We are to live **holy lives**. That means lives that are whole; not broken up fragmented bits of daily busy-ness, but lives which have a purpose and a vision like God's. Lives which contribute to peace and unity. Lives which bless others with help, with love, and with joy.

We are to live **joyful lives**. "Joy is the urgent business of every Christian person" said our former Bishop Ron Ferris at one Synod. It is urgent, because joy can be so lacking in our world. We don't have to look beyond our borders to see desolation, pain, disease, war and violent abuse. It's right there in our neighbourhood if we only have eyes to see it and hearts to respond to it.

We are to live **peaceful lives**. There will always be trouble with us. We can choose to sit down in the midst of trouble and allow it to destroy us, or we can choose to accept what we cannot change, change what we can, and learn day by day, the difference between the two. Anxiety and apathy can be defeated by joyful dependence upon God and upon each other. Even in Covid. With help when we need it!

I'm going to suggest that you try doing something for the remainder of Advent. I'm going to do it. If people around the world would join us, life would be change. Here's what to do: Say silently to everyone and everything you meet these words: **"I wish you happiness now, and everything that will bring you joy in the future"**. If we said it to the sky, we would have to stop polluting it. If we said it to the lakes, we would have to stop using them as sewers and garbage dumps. If we said it to small children, we would have to fight against their abuse. If we said it to people, we would have to stop stoking the fires of vengeance, prejudice and war which separate and hurt them. We would change. Beauty and peace would take root in us like the sun warming the earth on a hot summer day.

Like John we need a vision of the world that matches God's will. Then we need to be part of the process that makes it so. In faith. In giving. In helping. God will finish the process, but He calls us to begin. And that's exciting. Amen.

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### **Prayer for Today :**

Grant. O God, that as we rejoice in the hope of the coming of our Saviour, we may seek to prepare the way of His coming by advancing His Kingdom in the world and caring for the needs of our fellow men and women, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Keep us, O Lord, while we tarry on this earth, in a serious seeking after thee, and in an affectionate working with thee, every day of our lives; that when thou comest, we may be found not hiding our talent, nor serving the flesh, nor

yet asleep with our lamp unfurnished, but waiting and longing for our Lord, our glorious King, for ever and ever. Amen *Richard Baxter 1615 - 1691*

**Blessing:**

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, scatter the darkness from before your path, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory; and the blessing; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen

