

Mark 1:1-8 – Daniel Waldschmidt – St. John’s Burlington – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent – 12/6/2015

Preparing for Christmas is a lot of work! Think of the long list of things that *you* have to do to get ready for Christmas: Put up a tree, decorate your house, buy presents, bake cookies, send out Christmas cards, the list goes on and on. When we hear John the Baptist say, “Prepare the way of the Lord,” the mistake that we could make is to think, “I have to do a whole bunch of things to prepare myself for Jesus to come.” “I need to get my own act together before I’m ready for Jesus to come.” But that’s a misunderstanding. We can’t of our own power prepare for the Lord to come. Instead, it’s something that *God* works *in us*. It’s like our prayer of the day for today. We prayed: “Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son.” So we could say that *God* prepares us. **God prepares his people 1. By working repentance and 2. by giving us gifts in baptism.**

First, God prepares us by working repentance in our hearts. **“A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:3-4).** I saw a painting this past week of Saint John the Baptist. And you know usually in paintings of saints they have a halo and their hair is perfect and their face is glowing. But in this painting of Saint John the Baptist, his hair was all messed up and he looked kind of like a badger. That’s probably not too far from the truth. He lived in the desert. He ate whatever he could find in the desert: locusts and wild honey. He also had some strange clothing. **“John wore clothing made of camel’s hair.”** Is there any meaning to John’s garment of camel’s hair? Well, in the Old Testament, a garment of hair was the uniform of a prophet. You could tell that someone was a prophet if they were wearing a garment of hair. In Zechariah 13:4 it talks about **“a prophet’s garment of hair.”** So by wearing a garment of camel’s hair John was saying that he was a prophet, someone who spoke God’s word.

And he preached **“a baptism of repentance.” (Mark 1:4)** John told people to repent. Now repentance has two parts to it: to be sorry for our sins and to trust in Jesus for forgiveness.

First, to be sorry for our sins. Again, you might misunderstand this as somehow working yourself into being sorry for your sins. I tell myself I’m sorry until I really am sorry. No, sorrow over sin is something that God works in us by showing us his law. The Book of Concord is a big book containing documents that say what Lutherans believe. The book of Concord gives this definition of repentance: **“Repentance consists of two parts. One part is contrition, that is, terrors striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. The other part is faith, which is born of the Gospel.”** It says that contrition is “terrors striking the conscience.” Have you ever had it happen before that you realize you did something wrong and being sorry just kind of hits you. Being sorry for our sins hits us when we see the Holy demands that God has in his law. Now why does God show us the things we’ve done wrong?

Well, before we are prepared to celebrate the birth of our Savior at Christmas, God needs to prepare us by showing us that we need a Savior. You’re not prepared to celebrate Christmas until you want a Savior. And God makes us want a Savior by showing us that we need a Savior.

But after he shows us that we need a Savior, God gets to do what he really wants to do and that is tell us the good news that he has sent a Savior. Mark 1:1 says, **“The beginning of the good news about Jesus.”** Archeologists found an inscription from a few years before Jesus was born, and on the inscription it celebrates the birthday of the emperor Augustus and it says, **“the birthday of the god Augustus was for the world *the beginning of the gospel, the joyful tidings that have been proclaimed on his account.*”** They celebrated Augustus’ birthday, because he brought to the world bread and outward peace. And if they celebrated his birthday, then we should definitely celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ has brought to the world something much better than bread and outward peace. The birth of Jesus Christ is good news because he has brought to us eternal life!

So God prepares us for the coming of Christ by working in us repentance: by showing us we need a Savior and then telling us we have a Savior. The second way God prepares us for the coming of Christ is by giving us gifts in baptism. When we see John baptizing it makes us think of our own baptisms. It says that John’s baptism was **“a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** One gift that God gave to us in our baptisms is the forgiveness of sins. The Bible says, “Be baptized and wash your sins away.” (Acts 22) And on Pentecost Peter said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you, for the forgiveness of your sins.” (Acts 2) One of the gifts that God gives us in baptism is the forgiveness of sins. The Greek word for “forgive” means to “let go.” God lets go of our sins in baptism. God doesn’t hold your sins against you. They are all washed away in baptism.

Another gift that God gives us in baptism is the Holy Spirit. John says, **“I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:8)** John the Baptizer points to *Jesus* the Baptizer. Jesus baptizes people with the Holy Spirit. Jesus poured the Holy Spirit out on his disciples in a very visible way on Pentecost. On Pentecost here was the sound of a violent wind and tongues of fire that came to rest on each of them and they began to speak in languages that they had never learned.

But Jesus also gives the Holy Spirit in a much more quiet but still powerful way in Christian baptism. Jesus once said that Christians are born again of *water and the Spirit* (John 3:5). Titus 3:5 calls baptism “a washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” In baptism Jesus the Baptizer pours the Holy Spirit out on us.

One reason the Holy Spirit is such a great gift is that the Bible says that the Holy Spirit is a “deposit guarantying our inheritance.” (Ephesians 1) If you have the Holy Spirit that guarantees you that you have an inheritance in heaven. How do you know if you have the Holy Spirit? Everyone who believes in Jesus has the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor 12) What a great way for God to prepare us for Christ’s coming on the last day! He gives us forgiveness of sins and he gives us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance in heaven.

God has done a wonderful job of preparing us for Christ’s coming. He has shown us that we need a Savior and that we have a Savior. He’s given us the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit. He has fully prepared us for Jesus to come back. Amen.