

Advent 3 | December 13th, 2020 | Character: John the Baptist
Advent Wreath: Christensen Family | Alternate Telling: Claffey Family
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Intro to our Advent Journey

Welcome to the third week in the season of Advent. As we continue to wait with anticipation and prepare with hope for the coming of Emmanuel, we continue our Advent journey with the different characters in the Christmas story. We have spent time with Mary and Joseph, and today we journey alongside John the Baptist. In the weeks to come we will also spend time with the Shepherds, before spending time with God's love incarnate on Christmas. May this journey inspire you in new and exciting ways as we journey creatively through this season. We pray, God, bless this journey.

If you have your Advent-in-a-Box (or if you have some candles lying around), I invite you to take a moment and set out your Advent Wreath. Although we are apart, we light this wreath together, led today by the Christensen Family.

Lighting the Advent Wreath | Christensen Family

Person 1: The Advent wreath is a circle with no beginning and no end. It is a symbol of God's unending love and faithfulness.

Person 2: The light reminds us of Jesus, the Light of the world, the Light for whom we wait, watch, pray, and prepare.

Person 3: "A man came, sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world."

Person 4: Like John the Baptist, we prepare and wait. And as we do so, we light this candle and remember God's gift of Immanuel, Go with us, as we wait and watch for his coming.

Advent Wreath Response | *Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah* v.1-3

ELW 240

Light one candle to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.

He shall bring salvation to Israel, God fulfills the promise.

Light two candles to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.

He shall feed the flock like a shepherd, gently lead them homeward.

Light three candles to watch for Messiah: let the light banish darkness.

Lift your heads and lift high the gateway for the King of glory.

Confession + Forgiveness

Because it is so hard to wait, it is not easy to live through Advent's days. But watch what God does during this time. God waits for us to turn from our old ways to find the right paths; God waits for us to admit what we have done, and failed to do, so we might be forgiven and graced with new life. Let us approach the One who waits for us.

(Silence)

Waiting God, it is never easy for us to confess our sins. There are the hurts we have caused to our families and friends, which we would like to forget. There are those we believe are impossible to love, and so we don't try. There are people who live on the edge of our society, and we ignore their cries for help. Forgive us, God who comes near to us. When we have lost our way, show us yours. Lead us in humility down the streets of your kingdom. Teach us your truth, so we might be able to keep your Word, revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

God does not remember our sins, but does remember the promises which have been made to us. God does not shame us, but lifts us to new life. Lead us in your hope, O God, and teach us your love. You are the God of our days, we wait for you to come to us. **Amen.**

Children's Message

Opening Hymn | *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* v.1, 2, 4 ELW 257

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

*O Come, O Wisdom from on high, embracing all things far and nigh:
In strength and beauty come and stay; teach us your will and guide our way.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

*O come, O Branch of Jesse, free your own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell your people save, and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.*

Gospel Reading | Luke 3:1-10, 15-16, 18

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee... during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan River, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

As it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one shouting in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low, and the crooked will be made straight, and the rough ways will be made smooth, and all humanity will see the salvation of God.’”

So John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance, and don’t begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! Even now the ax is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

So the crowds were asking him, “What then should we do?” John answered them, “The person who has two tunics must share with the person who has none, and the person who has food must do likewise.”

While the people were filled with anticipation and they all wondered whether perhaps John could be the Christ, John answered them all, “I baptize you with water, but one more powerful than I am is coming—I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

And in this way, with many other exhortations, John proclaimed good news to the people.

Alternate Telling | *by the Claffey Family*

Reflection

I’ll be honest, when I think about the characters of Advent and Christmas, John the Baptist isn’t high on my list... nor is the phrase “You offspring of vipers!” (that’s not a very merry message). John is not present in the nativity scenes we set out year after year, and if he was, we would have another baby in the manger, because he was less than a year old at

that time. So why is it that today we come to a full-grown John the Baptist, complete with radical lifestyle, rugged dress, and stark diet? And, for that matter, why is it that *every* Advent includes a text or two about John the Baptist? We don't need to look any further than his message.

John is a messenger, and like the prophets before him, his message is one of preparation and repentance: preparation for God and repentance from sin. His words echo the prophet Isaiah -- "prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight." And just as it was in Old Testament times, this is challenging news for John's audience, and it's challenging for us today -- changes are called for, and we all know how hard that can be. But this call for preparation and repentance is also good news, for "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." This all sounds great, but I keep circling back to the question: what's this got to do with Advent?

Well, Advent is a time of waiting and preparing. It's a season when we prepare for the time of the Lord's nativity, it's a time to prepare for our encounter with the Lord Jesus. And lucky for us, John gives us a few ideas of where we should start. John calls for repentance, for us to determine what in our lives and in the world needs straightening, what needs leveling. John is saying that it's necessary to change the root of human behavior to reflect the characteristics of God's kingdom. What's needed is substantial change, not something superficial. The whole landscape will be changed, if not be us in our time of preparation, by Christ himself -- every valley will be filled, every mountain and hill will be brought low, the crooked will be made straight, and the rough ways will be made smooth.

And once we get past the landscape of it all, we see that John's message is also one that confirms the importance of living the compassionate life -- repenting of injustice and oppression, and working to achieve the peace and wholeness characteristic of God's kingdom. Preparing in this way means taking action right here, right now. This is particularly appropriate to remember during the Advent season, as we give expression to our hope for the return of Jesus. When Jesus comes back, he will bring his kingdom to earth completely. Whatever sin has made crooked, Jesus' justice will make permanently straight once again, but we don't just twiddle our thumbs as we wait for his return. We actively participate in the preparations.

John's call for his context and the people of his time is also a call for us to prepare the way for God who is *already* here, among us, working in and through us to bring about the kingdom, the reign, of God. The call is to awaken to a reality that's already here. Of course, in the incarnation of Christ (Christmas) we're celebrating Christ coming into the world in a particular time and place, in the singular body of Jesus. But we also prepare for Christ coming into our hearts and lives at a deeper and renewed level. In our preparation, there's a remembrance of what happened once, but there's also a preparing for what already and always is present: God. In this strange mystery, our preparation is to make this reality come alive, to make it become a living presence in our hearts and our daily lives.

And so, on this 3rd Sunday of Advent, let us hear again the message (and the call) of a full-grown, interesting clothed John the Baptist: *Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low, and the crooked will be made straight, and the rough ways will be made smooth, and all humanity will see the salvation of God.*' Amen.

Hymn of the Day | *On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry* v. 1, 2, 5

ELW 249

*On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings glad tidings of the King of kings!*

*Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin; make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare for Christ to come and enter there.*

*All praise to you, eternal Son, whose advent has our freedom won,
Whom with the Father we adore, and Holy Spirit, evermore.*

Advent Creed

We believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth. The one who is full of patience, who is not afraid of silence, who does not need to fill each moment with activity and noise. The one who is beyond bluster and flurry, and who does not jostle for attention.

We believe in God the Son, Savior of creation, who slipped into Bethlehem one night, mostly unnoticed, who lived thirty years without headlines or hurry, who frequently took time alone with his patient Father, who waited for the right time to become the suffering servant, who stood quietly before the noise of his accusers, whose silence overpowered their words, who died, then rose again on a quiet Sunday morning.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens, empowers, renews and refreshes, sometimes arriving with obvious power, sometimes with the quiet breath of a whisper.

We believe in one God who patiently waits for us, and who longs for us to do the same.
Amen.

Prayer of the Day + Lord's Prayer

Lord, here is a gaping sore: half the world diets, the other half hungers; half the world is housed, the other half is homeless; half the world pursues profit, the other half senses loss. Redeem our souls, redeem our peoples, redeem our times in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray: **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Sending Hymn | *Prepare the Royal Highway* v. 1, 3, 4

ELW 264

Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near!

Let ev'ry hill and valley a level road appear!

Then greet the King of glory, foretold in sacred story:

Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

Then fling the gates wide open to greet your promised king!

Your king, yet ev'ry nation its tribute too may bring.

All lands will bow before him; their voices join your singing:

Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

His is no earthly kingdom; it comes from heav'n above.

His rule is peace and freedom and justice, truth, and love.

So let your praise be sounding for kindness so abounding:

Hosanna to the Lord, for he fulfills God's word!

Blessing + Dismissal

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. Go with us now into the world. We can begin again!

Everything is about to change. So make everything new. Make us new. Reveal your glory

in our lives and in the rhythms of our lives, so that nothing will get in the way of your coming. **Amen.**

Go in peace to prepare the way of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**