

“Discover the Christ Whose Way Is Prepared”

Luke 3:7-18

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“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.” Amen.

We continue our series, “Discovering the Christ of Christmas” as today we discover the Christ whose way was prepared.

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the word of the Lord came** to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” Luke tells us that the word of the Lord came to John as he was called to prepare the way, because in his infinite love, God was entering the world in the person of Jesus to become a part of human history.

Today, the nation is still reeling from yet another shooting this week in San Bernardino, CA as a husband & wife in an act of terrorism killed 14 and wounded 21 more. ISIS continues to strengthen its positions in Syria, ISIS followers killed 130 in Paris during a coordinated attack, and they threaten continued attacks in our country. The U.S. is experiencing unseasonably warm temperatures for December bringing up the continued debate on global warming. Prices at the gas pump during the Thanksgiving holiday were at their lowest since 2008. Mark & Priscilla Zuckerberg commit to gradually give away 99% of their Facebook stock. And, Google reported that Brittany Spears is still the most googled name on the Internet. Into this time of history, the Word of God has come to you and me calling us to prepare the way for the Lord. God in his infinite love wants to enter each and every heart and have a personal relationship with everyone.

PLANNED

The end goal of God’s will is plain. God wants all humankind to see and experience God’s salvation. This is not God’s plan “B.” This is not an altered goal because of the events of Eden. No. From the beginning of creation, God had the goal to have all humankind experience his salvation. God’s plan is in motion. John was a part of that plan, and so are you and I.

Special circumstances surround John’s birth. His parents were old. His father had an angelic vision. The angel named him John. Everything about John proclaimed him special. Rejecting his inherent priesthood—something that was passed down from generation to generation—his faith was nurtured and he was theologically trained in the Essene community.

When the word of God came to John, he was ready. He entered into the wilderness—not an especially good place to prepare for the coming of the king—and began to preach, Luke says, “**proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**”

We can try to avoid or escape the truth that we have the same ministry as John. God is coming. God wants a relationship with his creation. You and I have been chosen to prepare the way. We have been chosen by God to be his children. We have been called by our baptism to be God's witnesses and lights. We have been equipped and prepared for our specific, significant ministry. The Word of God has come to us.

In the middle of this period of time, while we are Christmas shopping, baking cookies, enjoying the fellowship of others, we are called to prepare the way and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are called to share and to live the truth that Christ has come to become sin for us, even though He was sinless, and take on the punishment of a condemned sinner on the cross in our place, and through His resurrection bring to us and all who believe forgiveness, life, love and salvation. We are called to bring Jesus to a fallen world. We, like John have been called to prepare the way of the Lord, he who came and will come again.

PREPARATION

As we have said many times before, Advent is a time of preparation. The preparation that we are engaged in is not for the sake of Jesus. The preparation is for us. The Holy Spirit gently draws us to Jesus and Jesus waits for us to open the door. As Revelation 3:20 states, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hear my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and him with me."

Have you seen Holman Hunt's painting of Jesus which is based on that verse from Revelation? **Take a look at the screen.** Stone archway ... ivy-covered bricks ... Jesus standing before a heavy wooden door. This picture was in a Bible we had in our house when I was a young boy. Beneath the painting were the words, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him." Many years later I read about a surprise in that painting. Holman Hunt had intentionally left out something which only the most careful eye would note as missing. I had not noticed it. Do you know what it is? When I was told about it I went back and looked. Sure enough, it wasn't there. There was no doorknob on the door. It could be opened only from the inside. Hunt's message was the same as our text's. The same as God's. The same as all of human history. God comes to your house, steps up to the door of your heart, and knocks. But it's up to you to let him in.

The preparation starts with us. We are to open the door, to repent and to be baptized. Repentance is acknowledging our need for Jesus. Repentance is admitting "We Can't." We can't be perfect enough to make ourselves holy. We can't be the people we want to be. Unprepared and confused, we can't walk the path that Jesus sets before us. We simply can't, but Jesus can.

My first car was a 1966 Ford Galaxy 500. I know what you're thinking, "What a girl magnet that car was!" The year was 1973 and I was a junior in high school. One morning I went out to start my car to go to school. Flat tire. Lucky I had a spare. I changed the tire quickly and was on my way. I didn't think to drop the spare off somewhere to be fixed. "I'll get around to it," I'm sure I was thinking. About a week later I went out to the car to go to school. Another flat. Only this time no spare! Since Dad had left for work two hours earlier, I had to roll it to the nearest

station and wait while it was fixed, and then roll it home, only to explain the tardy notice at school to my Dad when he got home. When something breaks, fix it now, not later. It is true in our everyday life, and it is certainly true in our spiritual life. Prepare your hearts. Confess and repent for those things that are flat or broken in your life, the sin that is in all of us.

In baptism, God makes us his own, gives us new life, fills us with the Holy Spirit and commissions us to be his shining lights, witnesses, and body in the world. Help others to see their great need for the Savior who has come into the world, and has promised to come again in glory. Help others to make straight paths for Him as they prepare their hearts to open the door when Jesus comes knocking.

We are sent out to the world to invite people to give up on their futile efforts to serve powerless idols, to try to save themselves, or attempt by their own efforts to please God. We are to offer to them the opportunity to repent—to admit their need for Jesus and the salvation he provides—be baptized, and enter into the fellowship and ministry of God’s people—the Church.

CONCLUSION

The world will never be the same because of a man named John. He prepared the way for Jesus.

Nor will the world ever be the same because of us. Our love will make a difference. Our words will accept, encourage and invite. Our lives will shine for Jesus. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight paths for Him. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen.