

“Prepare the Way for the Lord!”

- I. With an honest confession of sin.
- II. With joyful confidence in your Savior.
- III. By faithfully using His means of grace.

Dear Christian friends,

It’s PRETTY HARD to miss the message of this **second Sunday** in Advent. We’ve sung it - prayed it – heard it in the readings. PREPARE - now!

It’s **pretty hard to miss** that message – but it’s also PRETTY EASY to ignore it. Writing the Christmas cards TAKES TIME – so too the **baking – shopping – decorating**. But there comes the point when you’re DONE. That’s just not true with our **Advent SPIRITUAL** preparation. It’s not a ONCE and you’re DONE deal – but an over-and-over – day after day preparing. We’re preparing NOT JUST for **Christmas** but also for Jesus’ second coming on Judgment Day.

Please take this sermon **as if** John the Baptist was talking to NO ONE ELSE but you. That’s the way I have to take it **even as** I preach it. So hear now John the Baptist cry out, **“Prepare the way for the Lord!”** PREPARE the way for the Lord 1)with an honest confession of sin, 2)with joyful confidence in your Savior and 3)by faithfully using His **means of grace**.

I. With an honest confession of sin.

Prepare the way for the Lord with an honest confession of sin. RIGHT HERE we can see how easy it is to **see John’s call** as applying TO OTHERS. We can easily become Pharisees – “YOU BET, John! Give them heck!” We can easily come up with a LONG LIST of people who need to repent and make an honest confession of their sin. That couple that’s **shacked up** without being married. That neighbor with a **drinking problem**. (If only he’d come to church **as often** as he goes to the bar!) That lady next door who HAS TO KNOW everything and who can’t keep her mouth shut. This list runs ON and on!

Go ahead and pray like a Pharisee, **“God, I thank You that I am not like other people!”** Pray that – but then hear God’s answer to your prayer! Hear God say, “**You – me – we’re just like EVERYBODY else!**” AS MUCH AS those other people need to repent **so do we!** We may be confessing DIFFERENT sins but **ours** are also damnable sins.

Before confessing any **particular** sin we must start with the REAL PROBLEM – **original sin**. We must confess with David, **“Surely I have been a sinner from birth; sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** With Paul we must confess, **“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. What a wretched man I am!”** We need to see AS JESUS did – that **“from within – out of (our) hearts come”** all those other sins we are guilty of.

I know you’re busy enough already – but please do this as a part of your **Advent preparations**. Get out your catechism and **read through** the 10 Commandments and all the passages under them. If you don’t have a catechism I have some you can borrow. Read through one commandment a day. Then take an HONEST look at your life **in the mirror** of that particular commandment. DO that and you will be praying like that tax collector who **“would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner!’ ”**

An **honest confession** is not bragging about our sins but being sorry for them. We're not shrugging off our sins with an "OOPS! Oh, well!" We're not making excuses. An **honest confession** is taking responsibility for our sins – admitting them AND that God really should be TOTALLY disgusted and **fed up** with me – that God OWES me nothing but His wrath and the eternal rejection and **punishment** of hell.

"Prepare the way for the Lord" for the Lord is coming TO YOU – to ME! But don't panic – don't flee – don't hide. ***"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God."*** There's gospel – GOOD NEWS! – for YOU – for **me** – for a world of **guilty** sinners. Please take this as if John was talking ONLY TO you – to me. Prepare the way for the Lord...

II. With joyful confidence in your Savior.

Prepare – just look WHO is coming! Mark quotes our OT reading. ***"A voice of one calling, 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD!'"*** That's Lord spelled all in capital letters. That's that special name for God – Jehovah. Jesus is Jehovah Himself coming to us.

At Christmas we see Jesus a LITTLE BABY – so cute – yet as helpless as **any other** newborn baby. Lying in the manger Jesus doesn't look like our ALMIGHTY CREATOR ***"(who) sustains all things by His powerful word."*** Yet the baby Jesus IS the LORD – the **eternal, almighty** Son of God born one of us.

To impress that truth on us John the Baptist confesses, ***"The thongs of (His) sandals I am not worthy to untie."*** For pretty obvious reasons that **was the job** of the LOWEST slave. Nobody fought for that job! Yet John the Baptist says, "I not even GOOD ENOUGH to do that for Jesus." WHAT humility – what PROPER humility! God give us such humility. As we prepare to welcome Jesus there's no room for any CHIP ON our shoulders. We're not doing God ANY FAVORS – God's doing us the favor BY COMING to us.

Mark quotes part of our OT reading. The opening words of that reading are words to treasure! ***"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that ...that her sin has been paid for."***

God doesn't shrug off our sins with a "That's OK." God doesn't settle for a LESS THAN PERFECT **love** and **obedience**. God never took back His promise, ***"the soul that sins, it shall die."*** God DIDN'T DO any of that – but God DID send us His Son to be our **perfect** Savior. Jesus took our place under God's law and paid off our debt. SAVOR – treasure – STAY FOCUSED on the real meaning of Christmas – **Jesus born** our Savior. Jesus lived for us that **holy, perfect life** we never could. Jesus took the blame for the sins of the whole world and was punished in our place. Jesus endured the **death** and **hell** we had coming. Jesus conquered death and the grave for us with His **own triumphant resurrection** from the dead.

Because Jesus did all that for us we can now breathe a BIG SIGH of **relief**. That's what the Hebrew word for comfort **literally** means. CLINGING TO Jesus – washed clean by His blood – clothed with His perfect life – we can breathe a **big sigh** of relief. God loves us. We're forgiven. We have eternal life in heaven.

Trusting in Jesus we now prepare for His **second coming** with a JOYFUL CONFIDENCE. Jesus is coming to ***"take us to be with Him"*** in His heavenly glory – to live forever in that ***"mansion He has prepared for us"*** in His Father's house. Or as Peter reminded us in the epistle reading, ***"In keeping***

with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

Prepare yourself for THAT DAY...

III. By faithfully using God's means of grace.

“I will send My messenger ...who will prepare Your way.” It's **so easy** to OVERLOOK the obvious. God provides His people with pastors and teachers – NOT TO LORD it over them – but to feed and teach them His Word. John the Baptist is called, **“a voice of one calling.”** The WHO of the **messenger** isn't as important as the WHAT of the **message**. Far more important than the **personality** or **style** of a preacher is the message he brings.

God calls John **“MY messenger.”** God's messengers don't make up the message. They are to repeat EXACTLY what God has told them to say. It DOESN'T MATTER if people like it or not. NEITHER the preacher nor people **dare tamper** with GOD'S message.

“And so John came ...in the desert region.” John conducted His all-important work OUT IN the middle of nowhere. There were no easy roads to **get out** to John. There were no waysides or **restaurants** along the way. It took a REAL EFFORT to go see John in that barren wasteland. This was no five or **ten minute drive** to church.

God was making an IMPORTANT POINT. We meet God where HE WANTS. We **meet God on His terms** – not ours. Common sense was for John to **preach in Jerusalem**. THAT'S WHERE the people were. Or John could have done as Jesus did – **preach in** the local synagogues. GOD WANTED the people to go out to John.

Today we meet God in His **Word** and **Sacraments** – in church – **Bible class** – Sunday School – confirmation class – Christian day school and high school – those daily devotions at home. The sinful nature has a WHOLE HOST of excuses **for why** that just won't work. TOO BORING – too busy – too tired, etc.

God says, “This IS HOW we're going to do it. This is where you'll find Me.” DON'T be turned off by the **ordinariness**. SEE what a treasure God gives us. **Take Holy Baptism**. It looks so simple – yet it's **“for the forgiveness of sins.”** Look again at what GOD ALL DID for you in Holy Baptism! Through Holy Baptism God gave us **“rebirth”** – brought us to faith in Jesus – made us His children – washed our sins away – clothed us with Jesus' righteousness – promised us eternal life in heaven. Our simple Baptism is something to TREASURE and to LIVE every day!

Take Holy Communion. It's so simple and ordinary yet what a MIRACLE – what BLESSINGS! With and through simple bread and wine Jesus PERSONALLY COMES to you and me – Jesus personally says to you and me, **“This My body given FOR YOU; this is My blood SHED FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins.”**

Prepare the way for the Lord by faithfully using those means of grace. As Peter pointed out in the epistle reading it's been a LONG WAIT for Jesus' second coming. We can grow weary – **let** our guard down – get distracted. FAITHFULLY USE God's means of grace to stay focused on AND to stay strong in your Lord Jesus.

“And so John came” – 700 years after Isaiah had prophesied about him. *“And so Jesus came”* that first Christmas after HOW MANY **thousands of years** of waiting. One day – **every day** it's getting closer – **perhaps today** we'll hear, **“And so Jesus came AGAIN.”** Please take this PERSONALLY – **“Prepare the way for the Lord”** – NOW! Amen.