

Sermon for Advent 2C  
Sunday, December 5, 2021  
“Let us all prepare the way”

Text: Luke 3:1-6

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The theme for today is centered around preparing the way and the messenger sent to the world who does that. In the Gospel reading, we're introduced to the person of John the Baptist, not during his infancy, but rather as an adult, with reference to his ministry among the people. Remember, in Advent we will hear stories and discuss themes that lead us to the celebration of the Nativity of Christ, but we hear them in reverse order: the second coming of Christ first, the ministry of John preparing the way for Christ second, and the news of the coming Christ last.

Centuries before the birth of Jesus, prophets predicted the coming of the Messiah. We heard that in the words of today's first reading, which came from the Prophet Malachi. Now at the time that Malachi wrote, he wasn't making his prophecies about a far-reaching event leading to eternal salvation. Rather, he was addressing the people of Judah who had returned to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon and were perplexed that they weren't receiving the blessings from God they expected after having rebuilt the temple. Malachi's prophecies exposed the apathy of the people toward God and the corruption of temple priests, and warned them of impending bad times if they didn't correct their ways. But by the time of John the Baptist, the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC, Judeans needed saving again—only this time from the Romans.

The interesting thing about today's Gospel reading is that it intends to direct our attention to a specific time and place; that attention to the temporal details is typical of Luke's Gospel. “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.” Luke 3:1-6 sets the stage for John the Baptist's prophetic call by introducing a list of Earthly Powers: an emperor, a governor, three tetrarchs, and two high priests. Together they represent the rulers of the known world, the surrounding lands, and the religious, political, and economic complex that stand at the heart of Jerusalem. They hold all the authority, might, wealth, military prowess, and ancestry. The point that Luke is trying to make is that God would be sending the Messiah into a world held captive to earthly forms of domination and influence, represented in Luke's Gospel by men like Tiberius, Pilate, Herod (Antipas), Philip, Lysanias, Annas, and Caiaphas. But, interestingly for Luke, the word of God does not come to any of those influential men of power, nor to the political territories over which they have command. It comes instead to a lone man out in the wilderness: John, son of Zechariah.

Now, John isn't lacking the proper ancestral pedigree of his own. John hails from priestly ancestry on both sides of the family. His father, Zechariah, is a priest who serves in the Jerusalem Temple. Elizabeth, his mother, descends from the line of priests originating with Aaron. One might expect that John would be engaged in work associated with the Temple, the holy place in Jerusalem where God is said to dwell. But instead, John was born to be a prophet, and instead of serving the Israelites in the holiest place on earth, he is out in the wilderness, the region around the Jordan, at the edges of the Promised Land, far from the centers of worldly power, whether political, priestly, or religious, John fulfills his calling to "prepare the way of the Lord," as Isaiah predicted, by calling the people to repentance. We'll hear more about that next week.

So, how does all this inform us about preparing the way? We should all be like John the Baptist, proclaiming the good news of Christ around the world and preparing the way for Christ's second coming, but if we went out preaching like John preached, we'd be called crazy, foolish, and we'd probably be ignored by passers-by on the streets, subways, stations, and buses—in much the same way that we try to avoid or ignore those people when we run into them at Broadway Junction and the like. But, our preaching, our prophetic voice doesn't have to scare people away; rather, it can be an invitation to experience something new, refreshing, comforting, and enduring in an ever-changing, uncertain, and unfriendly world. In the midst of all of the things we read about on the internet, we need to be the messengers who remind the world that God himself came into the world filled with corruption, violence, religious apathy, and selfishness, and showed humankind that there is a way to live, in the midst of all that, that is liberating, just, righteous, devoted to God, and empowering.

We can leave today asking ourselves what we are doing to prepare the way of the Lord. We can ask ourselves if we are truly loving our neighbor as ourself, striving for empowerment of ourselves and each other, and being right with God throughout all of this. These are the things that can help us weather any storm of life and deal with the powers, principalities, and potentates of our modern times. And, they will prepare us for the coming of God's kingdom. Amen.

### Resources

<https://www.insight.org/resources/bible/the-minor-prophets/malachi>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-luke-31-6-5>