

ADVENT INTRODUCTION

People of God, here at Christ the Redeemer Church we follow the Church calendar. The Christian year is divided into two halves. The First half is what we call Special Time. It is a time where we follow Christ through the events of His life from his birth to his life and ministry, to his crucifixion and death, to his resurrection and ascension and his sending of the Holy Spirit. These seasons are known to us as Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. The Pentecost season then makes up the whole second half of the calendar, which is referred to as Ordinary time.

In the first half of the calendar we follow Christ's life in the story of redemption. And the second half of the calendar year then becomes the story of the people of God as we learn to walk in the light of Christ's redemption by the Holy Spirit. Hence the season of Pentecost.

The calendar is really just another way the Church signifies the relationship between Christ and the Church, as Head and Body, Husband, and Bride, but we do so in the division of time.

Now here we are in the beginning of the Christian year in the season of Advent. What is Advent? Advent literally means, coming, or arrival, and it is a time where we ritually and liturgically reenact the story of the people of God in the Old Covenant as we wait for the arrival of the Savior of the world.

Advent give us a lens through which we can see and understand our own life and time, as we commemorate the first advent of the Lord Jesus, and as we wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to come a second time to judge the world, and to finally deliver us from the world, the flesh, and the Devil. The calendar helps us therefore to have a dual perspective, one of hope and expectation, but it is also calls us to greater repentance so that we might be true recipients of God's Amazing grace, when Christ comes.

WORD OF GOD, LORD OF TIME

So let us look today at our passage in Luke 3 and see what it has teach us about how we can prepare ourselves for the coming Savior this Advent season.

Luke 3 begins by telling us what time the following events took place.

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 Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

Now, I think Luke is giving these historical details to prove that the story of Jesus really happened during a real time period and a real place. But I think He also is indicating something else for us, something that tells us how history is really governed.

What marks our time? Today, we mark our time by the Lord Jesus Christ. But before Christ, time had been marked out by reference to some king's reign. We see it all through the OT: in the seventh year of king Hezekiah, such and such a thing happened. Luke does it again here. In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...

But he doesn't just tell time by reference to King, he also tells time according to the which High Priest was reigning as well. And interesting he mentions two high Priests. Annas was the retired High Priest and the Caiaphas was the acting High Priest, but everyone knew that Annas was stilling pulling the strings in Jerusalem, so he names them both.

But again, notice how we tell time now that Christ has come. We mark out our time by reference, not to the regional king, but to the reign of the King of kings. We say, in the Year of our Lord, 2021. AD means Anno Domini, meaning the Year of our Lord. So we mark out time now by Christ, hence

why we also follow a church calendar that is based upon the life of our Lord.

This is why I think the most important part of the statement in this beginning section of Luke 3 is the phrase: *"the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness."*

The preaching of the word of God is central to history. Emperors and governors and High Priests serve as mere targets for the cannon blasts of God's word down through the ages. The reign of such and such a king or governor or high priest is just the setting and backdrop on the theatre of the world, where the Word of God takes center stage. And wherever the word of God is preached, even in the wilderness, that is where the one who is the true Lord of time and history makes his presence, power, and authority known.

Thus John the Baptist serves as a courier of the true Emperor, Governor, and High Priest – Jesus Christ. John's announcement is that king is coming, and so John is commissioned by God to get the people ready for His arrival, by preaching the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME

Now, as he is preaching crowds came out to the wilderness to be baptized by him. But as they come he says to them, *"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"* Calling them children of vipers, and asking them who warned them to flee from the wrath to come, is meant to serve as a rhetorical device to help the people understand what the real reason John is preaching for, and why the people are in the wilderness in the first place.

REPENT! Wrath is coming. You are children of vipers and serpents and snakes. REPENT! Why are you here if you are not going to heed the word of God and flee from the wrath to come? Why are you here if you are not serious about receiving forgiveness and deliverance from your sins?

And likewise, I ask you, people of God, why are you here? Why do you come here to Church every Sunday? You come here to listen to the Word of God, so that you might repent and Flee from the wrath to come. We live in a wicked and evil generation, and we need all the repentance we can get.

You have opportunity right now to be honest to God about your sins, and to receive true forgiveness of your sins, if you repent, and flee from your sins by being obedient to the genuine instruction from the word of God.

And yet some are still going to overlook your sins and justify them, or ignore them, or pretend that they are no big deal. John warns the people saying, *"But don't even begin to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our Father. For I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."*

In other words, some people's hearts are so hard to the gospel that stones in the wilderness have more sensitivity to the Gospel than some people. So do not falsely comfort yourselves by thinking you will not come under the wrath of God that is coming just because you are a member of the Church. News flash, people of God. Judgment begins with the household of God.

If the Jews were the physical children of Abraham, and heirs of the covenant of promise, then they ought to be living faithfully according to that covenant, as their father Abraham did. Right? And if they don't then wrath is coming from God upon them. Right? So, they cannot claim Abraham as their father, if they refused to live like he lived, in faithful obedience to the word of God.

Neither can we, the spiritual heirs of Abraham, acts as if we do not have to take the threat of our sin and the wrath of God against it seriously. We need to keep watch over our souls and repent of our sins, bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. We can not afford to make excuses, whatever those excuses might be.

The people of John's day rightly sensed the urgency of his message and asked him, *"What shall we do?"* And we need to ask this same question too. "What shall we do?" In other words, what does it mean to repent? What does it mean to flee from the wrath to come?

Listen to what John says to the people.

10 *And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?"* **11** *And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."* **12** *Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"* **13** *And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."* **14** *Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."*

In other words what you are to do to bring forth fruits of repentance is Simple Obedience to the Moral Law of God – do not be selfish. If you have extra, give it freely to someone who doesn't have. Give to those who are in need. Do your job with honesty and integrity. Do not steal and charge people more than is necessary. Do not withhold wages from people you employ. Do not abuse your positions of authority. Make sure you are paying people fair wages and you are not stealing from people. And don't engage in lawless sinful activity to help you make more money.

But notice that all of these actions which John tells them to do are not super big tasks. These are noticeable simple acts of obedience.

And today we shall we do? Well, we can do these things that John says, and more. But notice that John mentions things that are peculiar temptations to particular people in their occupations and stations in life.

John does not command that the people engage in navel gazing and deep introspection. He doesn't tell us to turn inward and consider the deepest

darkest places of our sins. Instead, he starts with plain old repentance from plain outward observable sins.

So a question we can ask ourselves is, am I being faithful to moral law of God? Are you coveting and stealing? Are you looking at pornography and committing sexual immorality? Are you engaged in an unlawful relationship with someone you should not be with? Are you a drunkard, are you being harsh with your family? Are you being disobedient to your parents and your church? Do you use your words in sinful ways? Are you using your position to get yourself some unlawful gain? Are you disrespecting your husband? Are you not loving your wife? Are you guilty of idolatry? If so...

Stop it. Repentance starts here in the normal outward obedience to the moral law of God. And that basic repentance then becomes the preparation we need to receive Christ and his baptism, from which comes even greater repentance and purification.

Notice John tells the people who were in expectation wondering if John was the Christ, that, *"I baptize with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and Fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

John says first of all, there is one coming who infinitely greater than he is. John is not worthy to even be a slave and untie the strap of his sandal. And Christ's baptism makes John's baptism into no baptism at all, essentially. John baptizes with water, but Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and Fire.

Remember that John previously said *"even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."* If you do not want to be cut down and thrown into the fire, then you need to repent. But you also need to see that that is the context of the day in which we are living. We are living in a day of fire.

And yet, some of you still aren't yet convinced. Some of you think you can still get away with doing as you please, making up your own standards, picking and choosing which scriptures to follow. Imagining that God was much like yourselves and is extremely tolerant toward sin.

People of God, I warn you, if you do not repent then you will get caught up in the axe swing of God. As Johnny Cash says, *you can run on for a long time, you can run on for a long time, you can run on for a long time, but sooner or later God is gonna cut you down.*

Even now. Judgment is impending. And when Jesus shows up, the judgment is made manifest. In each and every heart, in each and every person. The battle lines are drawn, and You are either for Jesus Christ and His Lordship in your life, and in the world, or you are against him.

Christ becomes the dividing line for all humanity. Thus he comes to baptize with the Holy Spirit, to give to those who belong to Him comfort and assurance and pardon that belongs to those who repent. And he comes to baptize with fire, those who refuse to repent, and instead rebel against his rule.

And that burning judgment of Christ, John says, is like a man with a winnowing fork in his sifting out the wheat from the chaff. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

But when will this judgment of fire happen? Are we to expect this at the last day? This judgment began the moment Christ steps upon the scene of history, and therefore it takes place right here, right now, wherever the word of God is preached.

As Jesus says in John 3 – *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and*

people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil."

Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ will one day come to judge the earth in righteousness, and all of humanity will be divided into two camps – those who love him, and those who hate him. But the judgment is already here in how you respond to Christ. Will you believe in Him and repent of your sins and bear fruit in keeping with your repentance, or will you love your evil deeds and walk in darkness?

GOOD NEWS

Now v. 18 says, *"So with many other exhortations, he preached the good news to the people."*

The word "exhortation" – is the word *parakaleo* – from which we get the word *paraclete*, referring to the Holy Spirit, which also means Comforter. John called forth, summoned, entreated, beseeched, urged, and comforted with the good news.

He preached good news of comfort. Strange way of comforting people by calling them a brood of vipers, and telling them the axe is laid to the root of the tree and they are about to be chopped down and thrown into the fire, and that the people like chaff are going to be burned with unquenchable fire. Well that is not comforting good news if you are a bad tree and if you are the chaff of humanity and if you refuse to repent.

But it is good news for those who hear this message today. There is forgiveness for your sins. There is deliverance from your addictions. There is healing from your wounds. There is light in the darkness. This indeed is good news for those who are seeking to flee from the wrath to come.

He sent his prophet to warn the people of dangers of their sins, and he sent Christ to bring forgiveness and deliverance from those sins. But he also sends John and Jesus to bring about real ethical change in the people.

But the preaching of good news requires the preaching of repentance from sin with the message of forgiveness. The gospel John preached manifested itself in repentance, which was showed forth in the people by them doing specific actions. That is why they each said, What shall We do?

The Puritan John Owen said, *"The gospel is never divorced from ethics. Not only is the gospel deliverance from the evil of sin, its filth, and its guilt, but it also leads us to discover what we ought to do. As Titus 2:11-12 says, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."*¹¹

HOW DO WE CHANGE?

People of God, we have been blessed beyond comprehension to have Christ come to this world to save us from our sins. But if we are truly forgiven, if we are good trees, then we will bear good fruit.

Now bearing good fruit comes naturally for a tree. It doesn't seem like the tree has to work all that hard at bringing forth fruit. But such is not always the case with us humans. We have to work much harder to bring about real change in our lives. Especially when we treasure certain sins in our hearts.

How do we change our hearts so that they begin to love what God loves and hate what God hates? It only comes through the word of God. What does Paul say in Romans 12?

"I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, and acceptable, and perfect."

If you find that you love something that God says you ought not to love, or that you have developed habits and or addictions that are sinful, how do

¹¹ John Owen, *Sin and Temptation*, 41.

you stop doing that? You need to change your mind. You need to transform your mind by the word of God. You need to read the Scriptures in a humble way, and listen to what God says about those particular sins, what God says about who you are in Christ, what He did to save you, what His plan is to conform you to His glorious image, and make you holy. And let these truths wash over you again and again. And renew your mind in the truth. And there you will discern what the will of God for your life is and how He commands you to live for your good and His glory.

The problem we have, people of God, is that we often love our sins too much to truly examine them in the light of God's word, and we prize and cherish our sins more than we prize and cherish the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is precisely this conflict that John comes to warn us about. If you love those things God hates and calls abominations, then you are in danger of fire and judgment. If you say, I am a Christian, but you align yourself with the enemies of Christ, and you identify yourself according to the world's titles and your sexual attractions, or your addictions, rather than identifying yourself in Christ, then you are in grave danger.

Consider these words from Romans 6: *"What, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means, for how can you who died to sin still live in it. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might walk in newness of life."*

In other words, if you are in Christ through baptism and you have died in Christ and are now alive in His resurrection body through baptism, can you represent the Living Christ in His resurrection Body by doing the sins that you are secretly doing? Can you mimic Christ in His resurrection glory of pure sinless perfection and absolute holiness by promoting the sins and ideas that the world promotes, which you are finding so attractive? You are to live as the resurrected Christ.

As Gal. 2:20 says, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me."*

Do you see people of God, repentance entails total life overhaul and transformation which can only come about by humbly submitting yourself to the word of God, and letting it wash over you and transform your mind. Do you want to know what God says? Then look to His word.

Isaiah 66:2

*"But this is the one to whom I will look:
He who is humble and contrite of spirit
And trembles at my word."*

Repent, people of God, humble yourselves before the Lord, tremble before the truth of God's word, bear fruit in keeping with repentance, and live in the power of Christ's resurrection that you have been baptized into. And you be ready for our savior when he comes. Amen.