



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

December 5, 2021

Pastor Randy Ott

2nd Sunday in Advent

First Lesson: [Malachi 3:1-4](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 4:1-5](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 3:1-6](#)

The Lord is Coming: Repent!

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from Him who is, who was, and who is to come.
Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

It has to be anywhere from 25-30 years ago, I'm not sure exactly when it was, but I know it was real early in my ministry. It was on this Sunday of the church year. This Sunday of the church year (the 2nd Sunday in Advent) always focuses on John the Baptist with the message of "**repent**" to prepare for Christ's coming. I don't know if it was Luke or one of the other Gospels, but I was preaching on the Gospel that day. After church I went in the back of church (at the larger church I served that I lived right next door to) and greeted the people. One guy came out and it looked like his underwear was way too tight. He looked like he was really mad and in pain. He stopped, shook my hand and said, "Don't you know it's almost Christmas? Why all this talk about sin?" Take it up with God. He sent John the Baptist as a preacher of repentance to prepare the way for Jesus.

Sometimes I think even as Christians we think the only reason that God sent Jesus into the world is so that we get a paid holiday and have a big meal and exchange gifts. Sometimes it seems like we forget He had to come because we have nothing to offer Him to bring ourselves to Him. We are sinful and we desperately need God to act because we can't remove one bit of our sin. Isaiah said all of our righteous acts, the good things that we do that look good to each other, without God they are all like filthy rags ([Isaiah 64:6](#)). That doesn't really fit in with the picture that we have for our Christmas cards of "oh so pretty snow," which is a lie, and all these other images that we have in our mind for Christmas. But that is God's image of Christmas, isn't it? "I'm coming into the world. I'm leaving heaven. It's not because I want to go spend time on earth as a human being. It's because they need a Savior."

So knowing our propensity to think *we're all okay and a Savior is for someone else, it's not for me*, God sent a messenger ahead of Him that was promised in Isaiah (that's what was quoted at the end of what I read to you from Luke 3) who would prepare the way for the Lord. He would say "Make straight the highways. Fill in the valleys" and all these things like the preparing of a road for a highway. What he is really talking about is a messenger who would come and show the people their sins so they look outside of themselves for salvation and can understand why Jesus came. This was John's message. This was his ministry. He dressed weird. He lived in a weird place. He ate weird food. And to a lot of people his message had to sound really weird, because most people like to think we're doing okay on our own. We don't really need all that much help; maybe a nudge here and there. But John's message was, as you'll hear it next week (he obviously had never read Dale Carnegie), started out with ***"You brood of vipers (Luke 3:7)!"*** That's not an ingratiating thing but he spoke faithfully of this message that mankind was sinners. He also spoke faithfully that God is greater than our sins.

Notice what it said in Luke. Luke is writing for Theophilus. Luke was historic. He had talked to people. He had looked into all of this and he wrote this historical account of the life of Jesus, and then what happened after Jesus returned to heaven in the Book of Acts, for a man named Theophilus. You can see him as a historian in what I read to you. None of you named any of your kids after some of those tetrarchs or anything, have you? Those are some weird names, but he details them to show us the exact time this happened. This is exactly when John the Baptist was led by the Word of God to go into the wilderness to start preaching repentance. ***"In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar..."*** Tiberius Caesar started reigning in what we now call 14 A.D., so it was in 28-29 A.D. depending on what time of the year he started. That's when John the Baptist started. He details it even more with Pontius Pilate as the governor of Judea, and the tetrarchs, which used to mean a ruler of a fourth of the kingdom. Now it just became like a lesser prince that was ruling over a certain area. He details it specifically so that for Theophilus and for us we know this isn't some made up story. This is what happened. This is historical fact. When you read the Gospel of Luke, you see him paying attention to details like this because he is writing for Theophilus, and he wants Theophilus to know this is not some made up fable or some made up story. "This is historical fact, and it makes a difference for you, Theophilus." What makes it a difference for Theophilus and for us today is John the Baptist went into the wilderness at that point in time to preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Repentance is used a couple of different ways in Scripture. Sometimes it talks about our sorrow over our sin. You'll see it used that way at times in Scripture and you have to look at the context to determine it. Sometimes it talks about repentance as sorrow over sin AND the trust that the Savior would take away those sins. When John the Baptist is preaching it, I think it means the latter because it says ***"a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."***

That's not the same as our baptisms today because he was pointing ahead to the Savior. We are being baptized into Christ's death and resurrection when we are baptized. But the one thing that is similar is that God tells us it was for the forgiveness of sins because John's message wasn't just all Law, you're all terrible (although he said that often enough). His message also had the good news in it that a Savior was coming. "Those potholes in your life in that road that you can't fill in, that you can't make straight, He is the one who is going to come and straighten them all because He is going to be perfect in your place. He is going to die in your place. And He is going to take away the sins of the whole world, and that includes you."

As direct as he was, at times it seems as harsh as he was, the Holy Spirit worked through John. People from all different parts of society went out into the wilderness and were baptized by John because they heard his message. "Turn away from your sin. You're a sinner who can't go to heaven, but here is the Savior who is coming whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He'll open heaven for you." You might think this is obvious. If you've grown up in a church your whole life, you probably think everyone knows that we can't save ourselves. I'm telling you they don't.

I had a conversation recently with someone who told me "It doesn't matter what God you believe in or what you think or what you do, who you worship or what church you belong to, as long as you try to do your best and be good God will take you to heaven." I said "What about where Jesus says ***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*** ([John 14:6](#))"? "Oh yeah, Jesus is the Savior, but if you're good, He'll take you to heaven even if you've never heard about Jesus." Why did Jesus leave heaven then? "Why did He leave heaven and come to earth if you can do good and be good enough on your own to get to heaven?" That was my next question. "He came to show us the way. To show us how to do good and be good" was his answer. I didn't say it because I don't know the man that well, but I wanted to say, "I'm sorry, then your God is an idiot." Why would He leave heaven if you can be good and do it all yourself? That's why John came; to convince people you can't do it yourself! Nothing that we do brings us any closer to God. He comes close to us. That royal highway is prepared but then God is the one who travels across it, comes to us, lives, dies in our place, sends the Spirit into our hearts, gives us the gift of faith so that our sins are forgiven and heaven is open to us. That's all God! It's not us doing good and being good.

When we're baptized into Christ, we talk about it being for the forgiveness of sins. It's not a naming rite. The kids already have names before we bring them to the baptismal font. If I mispronounce their name, they still have the name you gave them. It doesn't matter. Baptism is there to connect us to the perfection of Christ and forgive our sins because even as cute, cuddly, little children, we're sinners. This is who and what we are.

This is why God is so important in our lives. This message that He loves us, that He left heaven, He came to us, He forgives us, there is no better message! But it's a message that has to be shared. Whether it's John the Baptist, whether it's Paul, whether it's Malachi, whether it's Isaiah, or whether it's you, this message has to be shared because sometimes we still think we're pretty good. We don't view worship or church or coming to a Bible study or coming to a worship service as coming to a hospital. We think we're pretty good and we're here and people should be happy we're here and we're doing alright. No! We come here because we are broken. We are sinful people who sin daily and who need this assurance that God still loves us. This is what we get. This is why we're here. We're not here because we're all such great people and it's a social event.

I still hear some of our members say "I kind of miss when the only social event was going to church, or to Ladies Aid, or to something like that." Church really never should have been a social event. It should be sinners needing a holy God, and that holy God saying "I know what you are. But I still love you and I've still taken away your sins."

That's the message that we go out and share with others. We're sinners. Everyone is a sinner. But our God's love is greater than our sin. Our God's love overcomes all of this. So when the call to repentance is there, what we're calling people to do is not say just that they're terrible (which we all are), but to also say "Christ is the answer to my sin. Christ is the perfection my God demands of me. Christ is the forgiveness that my God has given to me." And that's the message that we live as we live in repentance. That's the message we proclaim as we proclaim God's gift of faith in Christ. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.