



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

December 12, 2021

Pastor James Enderle

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

First Lesson: [Nehemiah 8:9-18](#)

Second Lesson: [Philippians 4:4-7](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 3:7-18](#)

### The Lord is Coming: Rejoice!

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 and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

I'm sure you probably have heard the saying "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." You may have seen that in movies or books or even politics and in war. The times you see it the most maybe is in sports, in football. You probably wouldn't cheer much as a Packer fan for the Bears or the Lions. Last week the Lions played the Vikings so maybe you didn't mind if the Lions got their lone win against the Packers' enemy, the Vikings. It's easy to cheer for the team that is against your enemy team.

When we look at the words that John is speaking, you might get the idea that the people felt that way and how they might have cheered on the words that John was speaking. Did you notice what he says and how bold and strong his words are? He says, "**You brood of vipers!**" When he speaks about this, he is not speaking to the whole group. His message to the whole group is what we heard last week. He was baptizing people and preaching for a repentance of sins, this baptism of repentance, and many people were coming to be baptized. But here he is speaking to a specific people, some of the elite in the church, the religious leaders. So you might think that the other people that were there were thinking, *Stick it to them! You show them!* They were maybe happy at these words that John speaks.

I think as we go through the text we'll see the people's reaction and why, because when we see the coming Lord, we need to rejoice; not really attack others or be happy when others are struggling. The main thing, our first part of our sermon, the first focus is that we can rejoice in the coming Lord because the coming Lord doesn't play favorites.

That's really what it was all about for the Pharisees, these people that John was calling the brood of vipers. They were the ones who thought they were more righteous and they would strut and show how good they were and they had put the unfair burden on

the common people. There is the famous parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector and how he spoke about all the good things he did and how he was so happy that he was not like that tax collector. But what does John do? John is speaking about repentance and then he speaks to these men, these religious leaders who thought that they didn't need this repentance, this baptism for repentance. So he said, ***"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."*** He is telling them "There is a wrath coming, and who warned you to flee from this because you really don't care and you're not fleeing from it. He is leveling the playing field."

If you remember the prophecy about John the Baptist and the words he spoke about making way for the King, that he would bring down the mountains and level the valleys, this is what John's focus was and this is what the coming Lord does. He brings up those who are lowly, those who are faithful and those who don't see anything special in themselves and seek the Lord for repentance and forgiveness. He lowers those who are proud and those who think that on their own they can achieve God's righteousness or anyone who holds on to something as their righteousness as what they are going to hold up in front of God or in front of others as what makes them so special. For the people here, the Pharisees, he says, ***"And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham."*** They were proud of their race, of their forefathers. They thought they were safe because "Hey, we're Jewish and we have Abraham and all of the patriarchs before us. We're set!"

What excuse like the Pharisees do we hold onto? What excuse do we hold on to think that we don't need to confess our sins? What excuses are we holding on to that say *"I'm righteous. I'm good. I'm set"*? Maybe it's the fact that *"I don't do those heinous sins and crimes that those people do, those people that are locked away forever or those people that we rail against in society. They are just outright sinning all the time."* What do we hold onto that makes us seem like we are righteous and we don't need the coming Lord?

We need to rejoice in seeing that John speaks about Jesus, this coming Lord who levels the playing field, and makes it that we see that we ALL need a Savior and that we ALL have fallen short of God's glory. Once we see that, then we can see what the coming Lord really brings. This also levels the playing field.

Notice how many times in this section that John speaks about fire. In Verse 9 he says, ***"The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."*** Then later when the people

are asking John if he is the Messiah, it says, ***The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps 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 he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*** And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. Notice when he speaks about the harvest picture he speaks about gathering wheat, but then he talks about burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. It's interesting that when it talks about Jesus coming to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, often what do we think of for the first picture? We think of Pentecost. But in the context here, it seems like this fire is speaking more of something else. It's speaking of judgment, of justice; that Jesus will bring justice. For all those people who think they don't need God and for all those things that have gone on around us and we say "there is no justice," in the end Jesus will bring justice.

But He won't just bring that. It says John exhorted the people, he also proclaimed the good news to them. Jesus is the Messiah and He will come and baptize them with the Holy Spirit. What does it mean that He is the Messiah? It means that He comes also with grace, His forgiveness, with this Gospel message. So we can rejoice because the coming Lord brings both justice and grace.

This is important as it levels things because we see that He doesn't leave things undone. He has done the things that we need Him to do. In all the ways that we have fallen short, He hasn't. In the ways that we fill ourselves with pride, what did Jesus do? He humbled Himself. He came down from heaven, where things are perfect, and He lived among us. He came to be one of us and to be mocked and ridiculed and to face all the temptations that we have. But when He was tempted, what did He do? He didn't fall into temptation, so that He could bring us true grace and forgiveness.

He brings this grace but He also brings this justice. Why is this important? It's so easy for us to get upset or angered at the world. It's so easy for us to be frustrated with the things that we see around us because at times we think there is no justice in the world. People are out there and they are just sinning and no one cares and no one is doing anything. We can be so frustrated by what we see. But when we see the coming Lord is bringing justice, we can rejoice because we don't have to fear. We don't have to worry. We don't have to stress about the things that are really out of our control.

When we see that the coming Lord brings justice and grace, it means we can rejoice in another way. Do you see how all the people reacted? When John speaks to the Pharisees, the people aren't saying "*Pour it more on them.*" Look at their reaction. It says, ***"What should we do then?"*** We see that his words have cut them to the heart too and that they see that they have fallen short. Now, hearing the good news, they

rejoice and they want to react and show love to others. The coming Lord frees us to rejoice and frees us to love our neighbor.

Look at each of the words that John speaks to the people. He says, ***“Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” “Don’t collect any more than you are required to.” Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”*** What is that? Each person in their vocation and in what God has given them in their gifts and talents and blessings, what is God telling them to do? What is John encouraging the people then, and us now, to do? It is to love your neighbor in whatever way you can. The people who have been given blessings, those who have two should share with those who don’t. The tax collectors should be fair and the soldiers should not extort. We can love our neighbors.

The reason we can do this is because His Laws are no longer a burden. We don’t feel that the things we are doing are, *“I have to do this or I’m going to face God’s wrath and judgment.”* John has already spoken forgiveness to them. They hear of this coming Messiah who is going to bring this forgiveness and cleanse them from their sins.

For us, when we come and speak the words of repentance here at church, our Confession and Absolution, and we hear those words of forgiveness and as we come up to the Lord’s Supper and we once again taste the forgiveness that the Lord gives us, we are free to go out and love our neighbor. When we look and see that God has leveled the playing field (He doesn’t play favorites), we see that everyone is a sinner just like me. When God brings justice that means I actually deserve that justice, but He has given me grace. He has given me forgiveness and love so that I can love and forgive others.

We said before, what are the excuses that we have to not repent, to think of ourselves as more righteous or not needing that confession and absolution? What excuses do we have of not forgiving others, of not loving others, and of thinking *they don’t deserve my love or forgiveness? What they did is too great a sin, too wrong. I can’t forgive them.* We hold onto that anger and who does it hurt? It hurts them. It hurts others. And it mainly hurts us. But when we look and we see that God is the one who brings justice, we can let go of that anger and we can love and forgive others in our lives and not get so stressed about some of the things that might anger us. When we are so worried and so filled with stress, we can look to those words of Philippians to know that the peace of God surpasses all understanding to keep our hearts and minds on Christ Jesus. Then we can love others, filled with grace.

What does that mean for you in each situation? It’s different for each of us. But what is amazing about being a Christian is He just asks us whatever our vocation is (teacher,

office employee, CEO, mother, father, child, grandparent, student, etc.), love. Love your neighbor as a way of giving thanks for what the coming Lord brings and rejoice; do this with joy.

Imagine how things are as you give that joy that we have of knowing that coming Lord and Savior to others. Not filled with anger and not filled with the desire that I have to bring justice, but knowing that's what the coming Lord does. We come and we repent, but then we are filled with the joy that the coming Lord brings.

My prayer is as we go forward, look at that coming Lord. Look and see the justice and the grace He brings, and then go and love your neighbor in thanks; free, free in the Gospel, free to love others. Amen.

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