



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

December 8, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

2nd Sunday in Advent

First Lesson: [Malachi 3:1-7b](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 66 CW (Red Hymnal)

Second Lesson: [Philippians 1:3-11](#)

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

A REAL CHRISTMAS... Is Rooted in Repentance A PREPARATION THAT MATTERS

- 1. Where you start preparing matters: _____**
- 2. How you prepare matters: _____**
- 3. What you prepare for matters: _____**
- 4. The result of preparing: _____**

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:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. [\(2 Peter 3:9\)](#) Amen.

It's the season of preparation. We were just all prepared and ready for Thanksgiving with all the food. If you were one of these people, you may have spent several days getting all the food and making all the plans and making sure you had enough food for everyone. Now it's that season of Christmas in preparation, where you have Christmas coming up but you might have all these other Christmas celebrations. People are having Christmas this weekend, that weekend, and have all these different people to celebrate with. Not only do you have those celebrations to get to, you have all the presents to shop for. There are a lot of preparations to go through.

This Sunday we get to really focus on **a preparation that matters**. Something that we know we get to do, but we're going to see that as John the Baptist comes, he is helping us prepare for the Lord and prepare for Christmas and the coming of our Savior. But we

are going to see how this preparation is so important, how it really matters, and why preparation is important, but then what really results from this preparation.

We know that preparing for the right thing is important. If you play sports, you need to prepare for the team you are playing against. If you don't scout them out and know what you are going to face, what their offense is like and your defense is just not ready, or you haven't scoped out their shooter and how they play offense, you're going to come unprepared. Preparing in the right way and starting in the right way for your preparation is really important. If you're going to have this game, you can't start the day before. You have to be practicing and getting ready.

If you've ever done any building, you need to start in the right place when you build. You need to set that foundation. I was talking to someone who was going to a job and they went to the wrong job site with their truck. If you start in the wrong place, is that a problem? You're setting this foundation and the people start building and then all of a sudden the foreman and people come and they say "The house is supposed to be over there." It's going to be a big problem if you start in the wrong place.

So today we really see the start of the preparation with John the Baptist. Luke lays out a lot of history. We talked about that and we're studying that in our Sunday morning Bible study, how Luke is this historian. He is a doctor but he researched and he wants everyone to know the specifics. He wants to know who the religious leaders are, who the political leaders are (that guy I couldn't pronounce before, Caiaphas), who all these high priests are, and he wants us to know that and to know where this is starting. God has a plan. But then we see how it all starts. We see that the Word of God came to John. In the chapters before, we learn about Zechariah, so it says the "son of Zechariah." And it came to him in the wilderness. We see what the message was—preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. For Jesus and for us, it all starts in preparing with repentance. *Where you start preparing matters: Repent.*

Why is that important? When you look at where his ministry began, we see that it began in the wilderness. He didn't go into the streets of Jerusalem shouting. Do you think he would have gotten more people and had been able to tell more people if he was walking down the busy streets of Jerusalem? But no, he went out into the wilderness, and if you would ever go to that area, it's like a desert. It's super dry. It's near where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. So if you think about that, it's dry. Why is it important for us to start our repentance in the wilderness? It's to get away from things; to get away from all the hustle and bustle and to focus on repentance; to understand that God is coming to us and we need to check things. We need to understand that something is happening.

When he talks about this repentance for the forgiveness of sins, we see then what the prophet says this message will look like. Isaiah writes:

***"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.
⁵ Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
⁶ And all people will see God's salvation."***

What is that describing? It's like a huge construction project. We see all of these roads made straight and the mountains being made low. This is what happened when a king was coming. They would make the road travelable. But what is all of this? This is change. Things were going to have to change. *How you prepare matters: Change.*

What needs to change when it comes to repentance? We can really focus on ourselves, sometimes too much, but there is something that is changing in repentance. Repentance means to "turn away," so as we are turning away, what are we turning away from? We are turning away from sin. But why can we turn away from sin? It's because we know that it's repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

There is a saying that says people don't want to change until the pain of the situation that you're in is greater than the pain of changing. Have you heard that before? We talk about this in our pastor coaching program that people will continue in something for a long time because change is hard. But when most people finally change is when the situation changes, when they are finally maybe caught in something or that disease/sickness has finally caught up and now you have to change because you're really in pain. So what is that change we're talking about? It talks about turning from sin but then also a turning from relying on ourselves. If I am only turning from my sin and saying this is wrong, I don't have a motivation for it. I don't have a way to really make that change stick. So I want to turn from that sin but I also have to turn and trust, to understand that Jesus forgives my sins. So it's not just an action. It's a faith.

We see that when John the Baptist taught repentance for the forgiveness of sins, it was not just to repent of your sins but also to believe in a coming Savior. Jesus could and would take your sins away. We see this is what it means when we talk about preparing for what matters because it's salvation. *What you prepare for matters: Salvation.* When we are preparing, we need to know what is ahead. We need to know why we are doing this.

Sometimes as I'm preparing for sermons and I see something that is said so well I just have to quote it. When it talks about our repenting and changing and turning to salvation, I read this in preparing for the sermon: "Repentance is a change of one's

mind and actions. It involves turning away from sin and turning toward that which cleanses from sin. It's a complete about face. A man who repents is one who changed his mind about sin. He no longer finds pleasure in it but realizes it causes eternal damnation. He has also changed his mind about salvation. He no longer thinks he will get to heaven by being good." So when we speak of repentance in this sense, we include a turning to faith in the Messiah, God's promised Savior from sin. We have to see that focus that it's about salvation.

When you're preparing for things, sometimes it's hard to prepare when you don't know what is ahead, when you are fearful of the results, fearful of what is really going to happen, but we know that salvation is ahead and we can repent because there is forgiveness. We can struggle with repentance, with focusing on all of this, because sometimes we haven't gone out into that wilderness. We are in that hustle and bustle and we can't shut everything off. We can't sit there and focus on what needs to change, what are the sins that we are struggling with, what are the doubts and the fears in your heart that you can repent of and turn to God and to trust in Him. The picture is a great picture of change, a change in our heart and focusing on Him. That's the whole ministry of John the Baptist—to focus on Jesus. That's what brings that change about, in our actions and in our hearts of faith, of seeing salvation, of seeing the coming Lord. This is what Christmas is all about, what Advent is all about (as we prepare our hearts for our Lord). There are many ways that you can prepare for the wrong thing, but we are preparing for the most important thing. What will that finally provide us, as we see that all people will see God's salvation, what does that cause in you?

When you think about things that you prepare for, sports, a game, maybe a presentation at work, an interview, think about a test or a speech, how do you feel when you're not prepared? The other one I was going to say was traveling. You have to prepare to travel. You have to get all your bags ready. You get all your documents ready and make sure you have all your stuff and luggage all together. If you haven't prepared well for that travel, that speech, that test, how do you sleep the night before? Do you sleep the night before? You're anxious. You're worried. But what happens if you have prepared well for those things? The truth is you can be at rest. *The result of preparing: Rest.*

Have you ever had to get up and talk in front of people? Are you nervous to do that? Do you get all tense? But if you know what you're going to say, if you are prepared and you're ready, are you fearful? You don't have to be. You know what you're going to say. You're ready. There are all sorts of things that we need to prepare for in life and if we haven't done the work of preparing, if we've pushed it off, then it is fearful. Then we should be worried and it causes a lot of stress in our hearts. But when we talk about salvation and eternity, are you prepared? That might sound like a message of Law, "Are you prepared!" That's kind of what John the Baptist says. He is saying "Repent!" Are you ready?

As I look out to you who know God's Word, who know the Law and Gospel, and I ask "Are you ready? Are you prepared? Do you know about repentance and salvation and the coming Lord?" Does that fill you with fear? I hope it fills you with rest. This is what repentance actually brings. So often we are fearful of sharing our sins and struggles, but that builds up and it causes fear and anxiety. What does our Lord say? He says to come to Him. ²⁸ ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*** [\(Matthew 11:28\)](#) For His yoke is easy and light. We can go to our Lord. We can go in repentance and know we will receive forgiveness and salvation.

This whole season can be so stressful, so worrisome, but it's about finding rest. The whole idea of repentance should not fill you with fear but fill you with joy and peace to know that you can find true rest in your Savior. So my encouragement is to go out into the wilderness, to find the times to calm your heart, to get away from some of the distractions, and to prepare. Prepare for your Lord by looking at His Word, hearing His Word and that call to repent, but to repent and turn to your Lord knowing you are saved and redeemed and the Lord is bringing salvation to the whole world. In that you can find true rest. Amen.

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