**Dec 4, 2022 First Sunday of Advent**

In all the gospels, we are given a picture of John the Baptist who comes before Jesus Christ and gives the people a message to get ready for the coming Messiah.

Our gospel passage for this Sunday is St. Matthews 3: 1-12. From this passage I want to take a look at what John the Baptist, man of God, told the people of Israel to do, to get ready for the coming of the Messiah. There are four key words that are spoken in this passage. We must heed to these words if we wish to fully prepare for Jesus at Christmastime.

The first word is “Prepare”. When we think about when it comes to getting ready for Christmas, we immediately think about putting up the tree, hanging the lights, shopping and such, but there is one thing that must be done before anything else. You have to prepare your house to receive these things. Chances are, the places in your house where you place your snowman, your snow globes, and your Christmas tree are occupied by other materials or products during the rest of the year. So, in order to have space to put your Christmas stuff out, you have to get the other stuff out of the way. You prepare to rearrange the things accordingly.

In our Scripture for this morning, we are told that John the Baptist is the one whom Isaiah spoke about when he told there would be a voice calling in the desert. Let’s take a quick look back to Isaiah to see what was said about St. Matthew 3: 3 is a quote from Isaiah chapter 40, “A voice of one calling in the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God”. Further Isaiah declares that “every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken”.

When we look at the word prepare closely in Hebrew, we find that it refers to a clearing out. We are to clear out a way for the Lord in the wilderness and make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. This refers to the ancient near Eastern custom of sending representatives ahead to prepare the way for the visit of a monarch. Sometimes, they would even do work on the road to make it as professional as possible. They wanted to make a road that was worthy of their King, and sometimes, that involved removing fallen trees or filling in holes to make the path as good as possible. But, what does Isaiah referring to by telling us to make our paths straight?

The second word is “Confess”. In verse 6 we read “and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins”. Confession can sometimes seem like such a little thing to us. After all God is all-knowing, and He knows everything we do, so why is there any need to confess? So often when we go to God in prayer, we either skip confession completely or we give some generic prayer such as, “Lord, forgive me if there is any sin in my life. That is not really a confession.

To confess means to acknowledge or admit that you have done something wrong. If you say the prayer I mentioned above, you are not admitting or acknowledging any sin. To acknowledge or admit something, you have to be specific. Let’s say you commit a crime and go down to the police station to turn yourself in. If the cop comes to talk to you and all you say is, “I confess, I did it”, you are going to be met with another question right away. They are going to ask you, “Ok, what did you do?” It’s not just good enough to be general in our confession.

Confession, by its very definition, requires us to be direct and specific. If you would like to learn more about the other two key words: “Repent” and “Produce”, please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11:00 AM.