

“Are You Prepared?”

Mark 1:1-8

John the Baptist is the dominant Advent figure. He is really the last Old Covenant prophet. Mark begins his written account of the life of Christ with these words: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark does not mince any words when he tells his readers about whom he is writing. Mark tells us: “This person that I am going to tell you about is the Son of God. He is the source of the gospel. He is the source of the Good News of salvation.”

But Mark does not begin with the story of Mary, Joseph, and the babe in Bethlehem. Mark begins with Isaiah. If you want to know who Jesus Christ is, and what God’s plan of salvation has always been, read the book of Isaiah. Isaiah spent his entire ministry preparing people for the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation. And he told the people about the final prophet that would come and “prepare the way for the Lord”. He wrote of John the Baptist.

What did God instruct John to do to prepare the people for the coming of Christ? God had John preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The question then is the question today, “Are you prepared for the coming of the Lord?” Through the power of God’s Word,

John demonstrated the necessity for the people to confess their sins, turn away from their sins, and be baptized.

This is the same way that God prepares His people today. John says, "Prepare the way of the Lord." Are you prepared for the coming of the Lord? I encourage you to confidently say, "Yes." Are you baptized? In repentance, have you confessed your sin and received Absolution? This forgiveness does not come from man. It comes from God. Have confidence in the power and the fullness of the Gospel.

Unfortunately, many people do not know what God has truly provided to this world in the depth and richness of the Christ's saving work – the inheritance He has won for us and the literal hell we have escaped.

During this time of year, we hear all sorts of heart-warming stories that are supposed to put us in the Christmas spirit. There is but one Spirit that changes you this time of year, and it is not the ghost of Christmas past, present, or future. The only Spirit that brings real change is the one that has been dwelling in your hearts since the day that you were called to faith in Baptism.

It is God's Holy Spirit who has prepared you your entire life for the coming of the Lord. He has called you, taught you, nurtured you, nourished you, and guided you throughout your days. Because of the faith instilled in us in our Baptism, we are here today to continue our preparation by being fed by God's Word and Christ's body and blood. It is real and nourishing food. It is the food we need to live. I ask you the question: "Are you prepared for the coming of the Lord?"

The answer is either “yes” or “no”. If the answer is “I think so” or “I hope so” then you are looking at your faith in the wrong way. What is it about your Baptism that would cause you to doubt? Unless, for some reason, you were not baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, what is it about that washing of regeneration that would lead you to think that the forgiveness received there is insufficient?

In what way is Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection incomplete for your salvation? As if you need a little something more in addition for that to really get the job done. What is it about the flesh and blood of Christ that is inadequate for you to be prepared? What work can you do that you can add to the Gospel so that the Gospel now is complete?

This is the kind of thinking that St. Paul fought against when the Jewish Christians wanted everyone to also keep the dietary laws and circumcision rules of the Old Covenant. This is what Martin Luther fought against regarding the sale of indulgences and the concept of purgatory and the Sacrament of Penance. So I ask you again, “Are you prepared?” The answer is “Yes! My confidence is in Christ.” If your confidence is in yourself, of course you are going to have some wishy-washy non-answer like “I think so” or “I hope so.”

One of the questions I ask my confirmation class every year is, “If Christ returned today, are you sure that you would have eternal life?” And the answer I want to hear is the one that comes straight out of the Catechism: “If Christ returned today, are you sure that you would have

eternal life?” “Yes. Because I believe and I am baptized.”

The Holy Spirit has guided you to this point in your life, so that by gathering us together this evening/morning, we are able to participate in and receive God’s Word and Sacrament. For this we give thanks, and we pray to God in one voice. As a community of believers who possess the Word of God, we are able to exercise our faith, share God’s Word with one another, confess our sins to God and one another, forgive one another, pray for one another, and encourage one another.

During the Advent and Christmas Seasons, when you are asked if you are prepared for Christmas, instead of giving an answer that includes how much shopping you have left to do, or if all of your decorations are up, or all of your baking is done, tell them how ready you are to come and hear the Word of God. Tell them how blessed you are to gather for our special services with your baptized brothers and sisters in Christ.

Tell them with absolute sureness and confidence that you are prepared, because the Good News that we share is as St. Mark wrote: “the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” He is the source of our joy, peace, and hope. He is the source of the Good News of salvation this season and every season.

Living under the grace of Baptism, hearing His Word, feeding on His body and blood, you are prepared for the coming of the Lord. Amen.