

Advent Lutheran Church  
Prepare the Way  
December 8, 2024  
Malachi 3:1-4 & Luke 3:1-6

We are well into Advent and people are well aware just how many or rather how few days are left until Christmas. People are preparing the way – doing their part to get ready for what is to come. And most have crafted and are now working to complete to do lists – perhaps praying for no surprise last minute additions.

I find myself in this group. I have a lot left to do before Christmas. The next big thing on that list is to welcome you into our home for a time of food and fellowship later today. Susan and I both hope for a great experience for all, but we also would appreciate an absence of big surprises.

Today's Gospel lesson comes at just the right time to remind us of how God is at work in our midst during this season of waiting and wondering. It is a reminder that God regularly surprises us by choosing paths and people that we almost certainly would not.

The reading comes at the beginning of chapter three meaning not much has happened yet in Luke's Gospel. In chapter one he sets the stage for the entire book, informing us that two baby boys are soon to be born then announcing the birth of the first, John the Baptist. In chapter two Luke tells us about Jesus' birth and boyhood. And, now, in chapter three we find John the Baptist doing what he's best known for doing – preparing the way.

But did you notice the immediate context? Did you hear the who's who list of names that came before John's?

Luke explains, "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the

high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness."<sup>1</sup>

Strange.

The word of God came to John, son of Zechariah. The word of God came to John, in the wilderness.

Siblings in Christ, have you seen John's resume? He doesn't bring any extraordinary credentials to this important role. He's never won a single award. What we know of him from the other Gospels just adds to the intrigue. Our Sunday School memories of his strange dress and diet are accurate. He's the guy known for dressing in camel's hair and eating locusts and honey. He was strange to his contemporaries then and he's strange to us now.

In contrast, the first verse lists seven names. You might think of that list differently. These are a short list of names would be ready for further vetting and full consideration. They are folks many would immediately deem worthy of the honor of receiving the Word of God. They were well-known names. These VIPs include the emperor, governor, rulers, and high priests. They are the folks with the impressive credentials. They are the ones everyone is used to seeing on the evening news and following on social media. When they speak, people listen.

But instead of choosing a person everyone knew and instead of ushering in what is to come through the power structures of the day, God devises another plan. God skips right over the elite and chooses John.

God's choice is John the prophet. John, the one who isn't well known and doesn't preach in a megachurch. John, the wilderness weirdo who is crying out over and over again before any and all who are listening. John, the son of Zechariah.

The word of God came to John.

Advent people are you hearing the Advent message?

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:1 (NRSV)

The word of God showed up in the wilderness and came through John. The word of God showed up in the middle of nowhere and was proclaimed by a largely unknown person.

These choices are telling us something. They are communicating clearly if we have ears to hear. God is up to something.

In the days gone by, God spoke through the prophets. Surely you remember. The Old Testament contains many of the stories. Remember Isaiah, Daniel, and Joel? Remember Amos, Jonah, and Zephaniah? What about Malachi? I'm sure you recall Malachi – the prophet we heard read this morning. Malachi is the final book in the Old Testament and Malachi is last time we hear of God speaking through a prophet. Immediately after Malachi there is an extended period of silence – a 400-year stretch of silence.

And, then after all of this time . . . John. The word of God comes to John the Prophet – the one we call John the Baptist.

Strange.

The word of God came to John. And, John preached and prophesied. John shared his message with all who would listen. And, it is in that message that we hear anew the prophet Isaiah's message:

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

The word of God came to John. And the word of God comes to us.

So, in the final days of the Presidency of Joseph R. Biden, Jr. when Gregory W. Abbot was governor of Texas, when Jim Ross was the mayor of Arlington and the. Dr. Michael A. Evans, Sr. was the mayor of Mansfield, during the time when Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton was Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, when Rev. Dr. Erik K. J. Gronberg was Bishop of the

Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, and Rev. Dr. Greg W. Smith was the Interim Pastor of Advent Lutheran Church, the word of God came.

The word of God came to us. To ordinary you and ordinary me.  
Strange.

John prepared the way and now it is our turn to do likewise.

Preparing the way is a countercultural act. It requires our intentional effort. And, it may cost us something. Perhaps just strange looks from our neighbors or being assigned nicknames we'd never choose for ourselves. Or, perhaps something more.

Prepare the way.

Prepare the way with hope, with peace, with joy, and with love.

Prepare the way for the birth of the one who comes as Emmanuel – God with us, God among us, God with skin on.

Prepare the way for the coming of God's kingdom of justice and peace.

Prepare the way.

Prepare for the arrival of the Prince of Peace knowing that he will invite us to be peacemakers.

Amen.