

2nd Advent Sunday and Hard Words – *Luke 3:1-20*

Introduction – Advent is the season of expectant preparation for the coming of the Messiah. For Christians, the season of Advent anticipates the coming of Christ from two different perspectives. The season offers the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah, and to be alert for his Second Coming. We can learn much about this preparation and longing from other times of advent and we will look at one this morning. With Advents, there is longing, preparation and expectation for salvation, vindication and deliverance. But salvation does not come without repentance, without judgment, nor without the coming of the Anointed One.

Overview - Luke records the time of ministry of John the Baptist to both the Israelites (Herod, et al) and the entire world of the Gentiles (Tiberius Caesar, et al – vv1-3). What is taking place will affect Jew and Gentile alike. John came preaching a baptism of repentance (v3), a time of preparation which had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah (vv4-6). These prophecies were a combination of hard words and wonderful promises of an efficacious work of the LORD. Multitudes come out to be baptized and John receives them with hard words (vv7-8). This Judge and His judgment are coming soon, and therefore John's message is one of great urgency. The axe is already at the tree (v9), the winnowing fork is in His hand (v17). The people ask, "What shall we do then" (v10) and John responds with ethical exhortations that match heart repentance (vv11-14). This was only a baptism of preparation, of water; the anointed One was coming Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (vv15-16). His baptism would separate the wheat from the chaff (v17). Herod, reacting to the hard, personal rebukes, has John thrown in prison (vv18-20).

A Baptism of Repentance – There were many baptisms (washings) in the Old Covenant (Heb 9:10 speaks of these), and so there is some familiarity of this ritual. Also, Jewish custom required baptism of all Gentile converts, which would actually be an offensive requirement then for the Jew. But the covenant people of God needed a baptism of repentance like the unclean Gentiles. John is fulfilling Isaiah 40:3-5 where Isaiah was predicting Israel's redemption from Babylonian exile. A new Israel is going to pass through the waters of the Jordan to again conquer the land. This baptism is a baptism of preparation for One who is coming for the true remission of sins. The deepest valleys of depravity are not too low to be brought up by and for the Lord. In addition, every mountain of human pride and false glory will be brought low. Salvation has come to the earth, for *"all flesh shall see the salvation of God."* (v6). John's exhortation is for all to come to the waters of repentance and cleansing, for the way of the Lord, the Judge and King of all, is being prepared. - *Salvation does not come without repentance*

Preaching with an Edge – God through His messengers shows His hatred of hypocrisy, and He is not afraid to use language with an edge to get His message across. The multitudes are called a *"brood of vipers;"* they are offspring of the devil and not Abraham. They are sons of the serpent and not of the woman. Israel, as a nation, and from top-down, were in great rebellion against God while trying putting on a show – but God would have none of it (Isaiah 1:10-17).

The Look of Repentance – *"What shall we do?"* the people ask, *"and even the tax collectors came..."* True repentance has the look of simplicity and could be summed up with Micah 6:8, *"do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."* Share. Don't lie or extort. Don't abuse power. Be content with what God has given you. But notice how repentance looks different for different people with different sins and temptations. You must repent of your own sins, not someone else's.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit and Fire – John came baptizing with water, but he is not the Christ (the anointed One). The Messiah is mightier and comes baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Ezek 36:25-26). This is the gospel of salvation, but it is also the gospel of separation – the wheat from the chaff. Fire is a purifier and it is also an awful place of judgment. The King is coming – repent and be saved, or refuse and be burned (and if that is not enough) *"with unquenchable fire."* The Good News is not a Good Option among many options.

Hard Hearts (vv18-19) – Herod knew he was unclean and imprisoned the gospel. What does the hard heart want to do with the message to "repent," to "believe on Jesus," and "to bear fruit worthy of your repentance?" Do you shut John up in prison? Or does his word turn you to the living Word – for forgiveness, heart repentance, and transformation? - *Salvation does not come without judgment - Salvation does not come without the anointed One.*

This Particular Second Sunday of Advent, 2012 – In Washington State, *we* are today *"celebrating"* the union of sodomites and lesbians solemnizing vows recognized by the State and many churches as marriage. This is the fruit of our denial of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all of life. This has led to a redefinition of Creation (to evolutionism), of what it means to be human (legal abortions, with public financial support, and growing acceptance of infanticide), of what constitutes a marriage and family (no-fault divorce, no-penalty adultery, homosexual marriage). The trajectory continues. For instance, we are walking around with our eyes closed if we don't see death-panels and euthanasia on the horizon, along with more restrictions on any public rebuke of such immorality.

Advent is a Call to Repentance – God said, *"You shall not murder."* God said, *"You shall not commit adultery."* It doesn't matter if our civil laws have redefined such activities. At the heart of it all, however, is that God said, *"You shall have no other gods before Me."* Today is a day of great shame in Washington State. But it is the fruit of many shameful years. We are a people, even a Christian-people, in need of a baptism of repentance.

Advent is a Promise of Judgment – We are well represented in our legislation and we are receiving the very judgment we have asked for. Without Jesus, there is no deliverance from our sin. Deck the Halls with this truth.

Advent is the Declaration of the Coming Anointed One – As Christians, we can be thankful and rejoice for the situation we find ourselves in (James 1:2-4). Advent points to a promise: *"All flesh shall see the salvation of God."* He has delivered and saved a people in darker days than this. Awakenings have come. Reformations have been given. Christ was born of Mary. Jesus rose from the dead. The Father has given Him the nations. Hope in God with great anticipation.