

Second Sunday in Advent (Series A)

“On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #344)

Preparations...’tis the season for them! Preparing the house for Christmas with decorations. Preparing for Christmas morning by purchasing presents for various loved ones. Preparing for parties by baking cookies. The list could go on and on. In today’s hymn of the day, however, we are reminded of a different preparation we are called to do during this advent season: to make room for Christ as we “prepare the way of the Lord.” (Matt. 3:3)

John the Baptist, called by God to prepare the way for Jesus, announces the King’s arrival (stanza 1). His voice, that which Isaiah prophesied to come many years before, cries out to the people of Israel, bringing attention to the gifts that this Savior brings. In Matthew 3:1, John’s the Baptist’s message is an important one: “Repent!” (stanza 2) This repentance is a radical transformation of our entire person; a time to be converted from unbelief to faith. Nobody enjoys hearing they are worthless, vile, sinful creatures, but that is exactly what we are to know and acknowledge before God – that we are lost without him. John’s message is the perfect marriage of law and gospel. He brought the law to Israel, opening their eyes and convicting them of their lost state, thus preparing them to receive the beautiful gospel – the Lord’s grace - and accept from Him the forgiveness of sins. (stanza 3)

As John had a message for the people of his day, so he also has a message true for you and me today. Like the Israelites, we are called to repent and prepare our hearts for our Savior. Furthermore, we are reminded in stanza 4 that this proclaimed Savior *has* come. Christ has indeed come, has healed the sick, and has shown His glory to us through His lowly birth, His servant life, His humble death, and His glorious resurrection. We are reminded to prepare our hearts this advent season to receive our promised Savior – not just a Savior of old – but one who continues to enter our hearts today and come to us by His Word and sacraments. John the Baptist was and still is the voice crying to remind us our Savior not only comes to us today with his gifts, but will come again in glory. We praise Him whose coming has set us free! (stanza 5)

King of Kings, we pray you lighten the darkness of our hearts by your gracious visitation as we prepare for Your coming. Enter and make Thy dwelling there until you come again in glory. Amen.

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On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of Kings!

Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin;
Make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.

We hail Thee as our Savior, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without Thy grace we waste away
Like flow'rs that wither and decay.

Lay on the sick Thy healing hand
And make the fallen strong to stand;
Show us the glory of Thy face
Till beauty springs in ev'ry place.

All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets Thy people free,
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Spirit evermore.

Text: Charles Coffin, 1676-1749

Tune: PUER NOBIS Michael Praetorius, 1571-1621

Both text and tune are in the public domain.

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music, Concordia University Chicago. It may be downloaded or printed for local use.]