

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent – Year B – November 27, 2011 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY

Based on 1Peter 3:18-22 written by Pastor Paul Horn

**“God gets us ready for his coming”**

Are you ready? Are you ready for the 3400+ Soldiers who will return to our community by the end of next month? Are you prepared to support our Soldiers and their families as they reintegrate? Last week *OneKnox* hosted a luncheon for civic and religious leaders at the Leaders’ Club. We were briefed on warning signs of PTSD and the different organizations we can refer our Soldiers to and how we as religious leaders can support our Soldiers and their families.

Are you ready? Are you ready to move into the new church? I’m sure you are! But there’s a lot of work to do these next two weeks before that can happen! We have to pack up this facility, move everything over to the new church, figure out the new ways of ushering and directing communion.

This December we’re getting ready for something bigger. Yes, we prepare for Christmas, our celebration of the time Jesus came as a lowly baby in a manger. But more importantly the season of Advent is a time for God’s people to prepare for Christ’s second and final coming. The Apostle Peter teaches us this morning in our lesson that God himself prepares us for his coming. Peter uses a well-known story to teach this truth.

Noah lived about ten generations after Adam. We heard from the First Lesson that men began to have many children. The problem began when the sons of God married the daughters of men. Believers intermarried with unbelievers and sadly, the number of believers quickly diminished. The LORD saw how great the wickedness of mankind was on the earth. So wicked that Noah and his family were the only believers left - only 8 members of God’s Church remained. So wicked that God was grieved he had made human beings; man’s sin was and still is God’s sorrow.

God said, **“My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.”** The LORD, the compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness, demonstrated his patience by giving the world 120 years to turn from their wickedness and to turn back to him before he destroyed it with water. We can only imagine that it would take Noah and his sons that long to build such a boat! God tried to prepare the world for judgment. They knew it was coming. Noah and his family were witnesses. The ark itself stood as a witness to the coming judgment. But they would not listen. God’s righteous judgment came, just as he said it would.

Jesus used the story of a flood to make an application to the days before his arrival. In Matthew 24:37-38 he said, **“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”** The people knew nothing because they chose to ignore Noah’s warnings. God came with judgment on those who were not prepared. God will come again with judgment on those who are not watching and waiting for their Savior to return.

Sounds a lot like today. Like the ark our house of worship stands as a witness to the world. Like Noah, we stand as testimonies to the world. We preach and teach to the ungodly and wicked, warning of God's righteous judgment. We invite them to come and hear about God's saving grace. But so many do not listen. So many do not heed the invitation. They are distracted by other things, especially during the Christmas season. There are so many distractions - the advertisements in the newspaper, television, online, and billboards. The preparations for Christmas include spending money, attending parties and decorating the house inside and out, baking cookies and mailing Christmas cards, planning for travel or hosting family from out-of-town. Do any of these activities really prepare anyone for Christ's coming?

As Christians we also participate in those same pre-Christmas rituals. And there's nothing wrong with those traditions. But when the tinsel and the ribbons and the festivities distract us from preparing our hearts for Christ's coming, then it becomes a problem. Look at your regular calendar, and now add all of these pre-Christmas preparations - life is crazy! But on your calendar are we missing the space that reads, "Private time for me and God." Where are we going to fit in time for the study of God's Word? I make sure my children get to watch their favorite Christmas specials, but what about time spent as a family around the Word of God?

When we listen to Jesus' words and the account of the flood, we feel the raindrops of God's judgment start to fall on us, and we suddenly realize, "I may be in danger of not being ready for Christ's second and final coming. The Master of the house could come at any minute. Is my heart ready?"

God prepares you for his coming by reminding you and me of our sins - our sins of the neglect of his Word. Sins do not make us ready to meet God. Sins bring God's judgment. We need our sins to be washed away, so that we may stand pure and holy before the judge when he does come. This preparation is something only God can do for us - just as he prepared Noah and his family.

God gave Noah a promise - a promise that he would come to destroy and to save. Noah believed God and God saved him. Peter tells us how, "**In [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water.**" I've always found this interesting. Peter says that Noah and his family were saved through the water, not the ark. The waters of the flood washed away the wickedness. The flood drowned the wicked people. The water saved Noah and his family. The water preserved God's Church - the only people remaining on the earth were believers. But the water did not completely wash away man's nature. The First Lesson taught us that "**every inclination of the thoughts of [mankind's] heart is only evil all the time**" - total depravity. Noah demonstrated this fact after he exited the ark. He planted a vineyard, got drunk on its wine and one of his sons found him in a less than godly state. God had to wash Noah's sins away. God has to wash our sins away, too.

Peter uses the waters of the flood as an illustration of how he does that. "**This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.**" A better translation of the original language of the New Testament would read, "...not the removal of a dirt from the body but the *promise* of a good conscience toward God." The water of baptism saves you because God makes a promise through the water. His promise is that through water he connects you to Christ. So intimately are you connected to Christ that you have died with Christ. Peter talked about Christ's

death in vs18. Christ died once for all (for all sins, for all people), the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” Through baptism you and your sins have died with Christ. Our sins of being distracted by all of our misappropriated priorities, our sins of neglect with God’s Word. But the waters of baptism have washed away your sins. You have been cleansed by baptism. Peter reminds us that the water of baptism does not wash the dirt from the body. Take a shower or a bath for that. A bath cannot wash the inner recesses of the heart. But the washing of our conscience - God’s promise to you that through baptism, you have a clear conscience before him. God prepares you for his coming by washing away your sins.

The water saved Noah and his family in another way. The water lifted the ark above the carnage that took place in the thrashing waters below. Peter says that baptism **“saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** Just as the waters lifted up Noah and his family, baptism also lifts you up. Just as Christ was raised from the dead, you and I have been raised with Christ. We have been lifted up from death. We have been lifted up from hell and the grave. We have been lifted up to a new life! A new life that shows itself in your life. Just like as a spouse or child makes a promise, “I’m going to clean the dishes.” And later you look in the kitchen and see, “Yes! They are clean!” The same is true in your new life in Christ.

It was true for Noah. The Bible tells us that he was “righteous and blameless among the people.” Was he righteous because he lived a blameless life? No. God declared Noah to be cleansed of sin because he believed God’s promise of a Savior. Then, he lived that way. You have been raised to a new life. Your new life makes the study of God’s Word a priority. It clears schedules to make room for the important things in life – God’s Word and Sacraments.

There are important events coming up in our lives – the return of our Soldiers from combat. We want to be ready to serve them and support them and bring the Word of God to them. To prepare ourselves for this service, we will be in God’s Word. We will be moving into our new church. We will have busy schedules these next two weeks packing and moving. But we will prepare ourselves with the study of God’s Word – so that we remember why we are moving into that new facility: to prepare others for Christ’s coming through the Word of God.

All of these are important events. But none more important than the promise of Christ’s second coming. Thank God that he prepares us through his Word and Sacraments (baptism and Lord’s Supper).

Prepare our hearts, Lord Jesus! And come quickly! Amen.