

2nd Sunday in Advent – Year C
December 6, 2009
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Luke 3:1-6
Pastor Paul Horn
“Be Prepared”

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. ³ He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,

**‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.**

**⁵ Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.**

**The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.**

⁶ And all mankind will see God’s salvation.”

So is your Christmas tree set up yet? Are the lights on the house? Is that extra turkey you purchased at thanksgiving stuffed in your freezer all ready for Christmas dinner? Or maybe you’re more into the traditional German Christmas goose? Have you started writing your Christmas letter and addressing the Christmas cards? Don’t forget the baby Jesus stamps... Is the family Christmas picture taken yet? Have you thought about baking cookies this year? Have you mapped out on your calendar all of the Christmas specials on television? Are you all done shopping for presents? Have you made plans for your vacation time yet? Perhaps a better question, “Have you figured out how to pay for all of this?” or where you smart and recorded last year’s holiday spending so that you budgeted throughout this past year and you’re paying cash for everything? Probably not, but it sounds like a good idea to do this year, doesn’t it? Are you prepared for Christmas? I think I covered everything...

Oh, I forgot to mention, how’s your heart? I’m not talking about exercising so you’re prepared for all the garbage you’re going to eat over the holiday, but how’s your heart? Is it prepared for the coming of the King?

Our lesson is from Luke 3 this morning. Toward the end of the lesson we hear a prophecy from the prophet Isaiah, who describes John the Baptist’s job description, 700 years before the boy was even born. John came to “prepare the way for the Lord.” I’ve been studying the biblical languages for 12 years now and every week I sit down and study these texts in preparation for a sermon, it still continues to amaze me... the words the Holy Spirit chose to use. In the Greek language, *to prepare* in vs4, means *to make ready*. It refers to an ancient oriental custom of

sending workers ahead of a king to fill in the potholes, smooth out the rough places, level the roads, so that when the king traveled absolutely everything was ready for his coming.

The King is coming! Is your heart prepared? Are all the valleys filled in? Is every mountain and hill made low? Are the rough ways made smooth? Have the crooked roads become straight?

There's another interesting word, *crooked*. The Greek word for *crooked* is where we get our English word *scoliosis*. Scoliosis is a curvature in the spine. Severe cases are typically found in girls more than boys, and if not treated can result in a degenerative joint condition in the spine. If scoliosis is detected early a back brace or good chiropractic care can straighten the spine to its proper curvature.

If we were to take an x-ray of your heart, would the film reveal crooked places in your heart, places that are not in alignment with God's will, crooked roads that make us unprepared for the King's coming?

There's a cute Christmas program on television that my kids like to watch called *Shrek the Halls*. Shrek is a big green ogre who lives in a swamp with his wife and three ogre babies, and someone tells him that it's time for Christmas, but poor Shrek doesn't know what Christmas is, so he goes to a bookstore and buys a book called *Christmas for Dummies*. Shrek then goes home and tries to make Christmas perfect, according to the book. And so the ogre is busy, busy, busy, setting up the Christmas tree, putting up the decorations, buying presents, and finally, he tries to set the mood so it's just right for the reading of the Christmas story, but it doesn't happen, so Shrek loses it. And in the end, he still doesn't understand what Christmas is all about.

This cartoon has some funny scenes, but it makes me very sad. In it I saw a reflection of my own heart, and maybe yours. I saw the reflection of hearts that have been made crooked by the busyness of the Christmas season, "These things," we claim, "need to be done before Christmas." We end up skipping the many opportunities to worship and to be in the study of God's Word. We gloss over the opportunities to sit down with the family and pray and read a devotion, which is what we need to be doing during Advent, where we can properly prepare our hearts for the coming of our King. Our neglect of God's Word in worship and Bible study and private devotion is an omission of the 3rd commandment. Our inactivity shows the crooked roads in our hearts, hearts that are not in line with God's will, his will is that we put the study of his Word and public worship as most important on our list of priorities. Instead we loathe God's Word.

There's another part of that cartoon (*Shrek the Halls*) that is humorous. Shrek's friends all come over to his swamp for the Christmas party, but he doesn't like that too much. He wants a nice, quiet Christmas, with just the family. Maybe you like a quiet Christmas and if family visits, you can't wait for them to leave, or maybe they feel the same way about you when you come to visit them. All kidding aside, are you preparing your hearts to meet the King, when you invite your relatives to church, they politely decline, but you stay at home with them? Or when you visit the relatives, and you Google the nearest Lutheran church and invite your relatives to church, but they decline and so you stay home, too. What are you saying to your God? "My family is more

important than you.” “But they’re family,” you protest. “I don’t want to put a mark on our relationship.” But what about your relationship with your God? Remember when Jesus said, **“Anyone who loves his father or mother or son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”** Again, this inactivity shows the crooked roads and rough places in our hearts.

Dishonoring God and his Word... perhaps these roads can be straightened out and patched more easily than other parts of our hearts. That’s right... we haven’t even examined the x-rays of our hearts that reveal the roads that have gaping holes and jagged corners, roads in our hearts that go in circles, indicating that we are stuck in certain shameful sinful activities... you know the ones that are particular to you and you alone... I know the ones that are particular to me... the crooked roads, the rough ways... By the looks of these x-rays we need severe spiritual chiropractic care to straighten things out.

What did John the Baptist do to straighten out the people of Israel? Clearly they were not ready for the coming of the Messiah. Evidence is that “the whole Judean countryside went out to be baptized...”

When they did, God told John to preach **“a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”**

Repentance, another one of those interesting Greek words. *Repentance* usually has one of two meanings in the Bible. One means to do an about face, that is, to turn away from sin. The other meaning is to show sorrow for sins committed. That is the meaning we have here. John told the people *to repent*, to acknowledge their sins, and to be sorry for them, and then, most importantly, he pointed them to “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” He pointed them to believe in the Messiah who would bring them forgiveness and healing, then, and only then, would they be ready and eager to receive him as their King and he in turn receive them as his people!

John says to you and me, “Straighten out the crooked places in your heart. Repent! Acknowledge your twisted sinful ways.” When John the Baptist points the finger of God’s law at our hearts, we have no choice but to confess, “We have sinned. We have allowed the busyness of Christmas and the relationships we have with our families to be more important than our God, his Word and public worship. We are sorry that we have committed these sins. We are sorry that we have offended our God.”

In repentance, be sorry for your sins, and then, more importantly, in faith turn to your God for forgiveness. Turn to the means he has used to convey this forgiveness to you: your baptism. Yes, it was at your baptism that the Holy Spirit freely worked forgiveness of all your sins, delivered your soul from death and the devil, and gave you the gift of eternal life. In Titus 3 the Apostle Paul wrote, **“God saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the HS, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”**

It was in baptism that the Holy Spirit applied spiritual chiropractic care to your heart. The Holy Spirit applied Christ’s life to you, a life that was not lived while walking on a curved path, according to his own ideas, but Jesus lived walking the straight line, his priorities were always in order with his Father’s will. Do you remember that one time when he when he was preaching in

that small town and someone tapped him on the shoulder and said, “Jesus, your mother and brothers and sisters are here to see you.” Did he step down and say, “Oh, I have to go see my family?” No, he asked, “Who are my mother and brothers and sister? These people are.” Jesus lived his life keeping God’s Word as number one in his life. He did that for you. Our relationship with him is the most important relationship we can have. Because of our sins of misplaced priorities, our relationship with God ought to be ruined forever. But Paul says in 2Corinthians 5:19, **“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.”** Because Christ Jesus died in your place and took your sins on himself, God has not added up your sins against you, he did that already to his Son. Christ Jesus restored the ruined relationship between you and your God. At your Baptism the Holy Spirit transferred Jesus’ death to you personally. All of your sins of missed priorities were washed away by his death on the cross – received through your baptism.

The places in your heart that once were crooked are now straight. The rough places have been made smooth through the offering of Jesus’ life and death. Your heart is in alignment with God’s will through baptism. God sees in you a new heart that wishes to line up with his will. He sees a heart that is prepared for the King’s coming. Every day we will continue to prepare ourselves so that we do not fall back into those crooked ways - again through baptism. Now, this does not mean that we have to be baptized everyday.

Luther explains in his small catechism, **“Baptism means that the Old Adam (sinful nature) in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”** As always he backs up his writings with Scripture, the Apostle Paul in Romans 6, **“We were buried with Christ into death through baptism, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too may live a new life.”**

Drown those old selfish ways through repentance. Every day acknowledge, “Yes, I have allowed the frenzy of Christmas to take over my life. Yes, I have succumbed to the feelings of my family more than my relationship with my God. Yes, I have allowed worldly sinful desires take over in the place of God in my heart. I am sincerely sorry for those sins.”

No more of these crooked ways. I will set them aside. Christ came to live in my place. He came to die as my substitute. He rose so that I might live as his child forever. He will come again for me. His coming is most important to my life right now, and so I want to be prepared more than anything. I am prepared for the coming of my King, for I have been baptized into Christ! And so have you. Be prepared for the coming of your King. Straighten out the crooked roads. Amen.