

Grace mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. “Just wait ‘til your father comes home.” Some of you probably remember hearing those words when you were little. The words are supposed to cause fear in children who are to dread the coming parent.

Christmas time is a mixed bag. In our 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent, we continue to Christmas. It comes closer and closer. Children get more excited as Christmas lists are given and wait for their wishes to be filled. Some are excited about the parties and the gatherings we go to. We celebrate with family and friends. Some are not so excited as they are remember a spouse, or a parent, or a child is no longer around to celebrate the Jesus’ birth.

We continue on in Advent and today we prepare. God is coming. We remember from last week, that our Lord, our God, our Jesus, comes to save. We ought not dread his coming, His birth nor final coming should we dread.

God is coming so we better get ready. John the Baptist comes onto the scene of Advent like a thunderbolt and tells us that we need to some preparing. God is coming, and we better get ready. We have some major work to do. We are to deal with sin. And not just the white lies and little excuses we make for ourselves, but those too. We are to deal with the sins we want to avoid and hide and run from. God is coming and he will make us deal with those sins. Prepare yourselves, God is coming. And the good news is that he prepares you.

What is your favorite Christmas tune? This is a time of the year that even our favorite ones can be run too much as Christmas music plays on the radio, at the mall, on Oxford Street, and at the grocery stores. My favorite is “Away in a Manger.” The third

verse is a prayer my family will use before bedtime. Sing it with me... Is your favorite, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing?” or “Go, Tell It on the Mountain?” what about “Joy to the World?” perhaps “Silent Night?” or “What Child is this?” These are tunes precious to us because of the time of the year. Christmas is special.

“The reason for the season” has become a mantra for many. Jesus is the reason for the season. It is a saying that has become used often because of efforts to secularize Christmas, to make an un-Christian event. The effort is the reason that the White House has said we have holiday trees, not Christmas trees. Some may say “Season’s greetings” or “Happy Holidays.” And so we, we who call Jesus Lord, may say Jesus is the reason for the season.

Well, here is the thing. You are the reason for the season. Jesus was born, lived and grew so that God would die for you. He died paying for the penalty that our sins deserve. You, my brothers and sisters in Christ, you are the reason for the season.

Today is a bitter reminder of why Jesus is born. Today we turn to the subject of sin. Yeah, I know that we do not want to look at sin because we are in the festive spirit of Christmas. We ought to talk of angels, and shepherds, and kings from afar, and the little drummer boy. We do not want to hear of sin. We want to ignore it or avoid it or hide it. We do want to deal with it right now. After all, we look forward to the birth of the king. We ought to be happy! Let us sing carols and drink eggnog. Let us not turn to sin. Let us not listen to John the Baptist.

We want to hide from sin. We want to turn from it. Our lives are so cluttered we pray and ask for help. John the Baptist tells us to repent and deal with it. He

is the voice in the wilderness that shouts, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” We repent to believe and trust in the promises of our God.

“Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.” Rather drastic imagery. Filling in valleys, leveling mountains and hills. How many of you farmers would make the investment to level off your fields so that they are good and flat so they drain well and hold just the right amount of moisture? It is very drastic reworking and that is the effect of the Word of God. Drastic. We are called to realize the brokenness sinfulness of our lives, and repent of it. We are to see how badly we need God in our lives.

The Pharisees and Sadducees did not see their sinfulness. We know from the Gospel of Matthew that they went out to see John the Baptist. But they were comfortable in their self-righteousness. They were comfortable and satisfied were their big offerings, and getting the seats of honor, and the recognition that they got in the marketplace. They thought that their works and deeds made them right with God.

It is a good thing that we are not like those Pharisees and Sadducees, right? After all they held down the poor and mistreated widows. They refused to believe that Jesus was God. And more than that, they crucified our Lord to save their religious system. How dare they? We tell John the Baptist, “Go get ‘em John! Call ‘em a brood of vipers!” And look at us. We do much good. We serve in some position of leadership. Perhaps we attend Sunday School or Adult Bible Study faithfully or perhaps we teach Sunday School. These are all noble and wonderful things, but as wonderful and noble as they are, not one of them earns us a place in God's family.

In fact John says to the entire crowd, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” All of us are to repent.

God deals with all of mankind according to His law. He deals with man, calling Him to repent. He wants all men to see that His law only brings death. And no amount of perfection on our part will satisfy the needs of the law. We are to see how sinful we are and how much we need God. We repent.

But how do we react to sin. How do we deal with problems? Ignore it? Hide it? Pretend it ain’t there? Or explain it? Our sinful flesh reasons that after all it is such a small offense, why make a big deal? Why make such a pretense? It such a silly deal after all. How often do we make excuses or explain it away. how our sinful flesh will handle sin.

God takes care of our sin. He handles it. His Son died for our sins and wants us to benefit from it. How does his forgiveness apply to you? How does God want you, makes you handle sin?

The first step of repentance is the realization that we are by nature sinful and unclean, that we have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed, that we deserve nothing but punishment for these sins, punishment both here in time and forever in eternity. Repentance begins by expressing a sincere sorrow for these sins.

But it is not enough to merely be sorry. Repentance goes beyond sorrow to faith in Christ Jesus.

The Holy Spirit drives the sinner to the mercy of God the Father and begs forgiveness for the sake of His son Christ Jesus. We go to the Cross. We respond.

There we see the salvation of God. Here at the Cross-is where we become Christians. Dr. Martin Luther says, “When I admonish to confession I am doing nothing else but admonishing you to BE a Christian. If I bring you to become a Christian then I have also brought you to Confession.” Here we have forgiveness. John the Apostle writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” We repent and are forgiven by God.

The gospel is for the broken sinner, and all of us are the worst. All of can say that. We wonder if our sin is too big for the cross, or at the other end, if it is too small for God to bother with, or even worse, if we can forgive ourselves. We know the brokenness of sin very well, and sometimes wonder, “Is there good news for me?” Yes. It is for the broken heart that cannot forgive itself. The gospel is power to overcome our own shame and pain.

The spirit of God transforms us. He takes all the clutter and pain out of hearts, and fills us with the love of God. He straightens the crooked paths by which we have wandered and bring us home again. He will tear down stubborn pride and melt our hardened hearts to enfold us in His loving arms. Jesus will lift us up out of the pit of despair and grief to comfort us with the presence of His Holy Sprit and restore us to the joy of salvation.

Jesus will force us, and yes it will probably hurt, to deal with our sin, all of our sins. Those we hide from, those we excuse. But we deal with our sin not afraid, but confident in forgiveness. In Christ, we're forgiven of our sins. The things we do which betray the holiness and the love of God. The things we do which hurt our neighbors. The ways we hurt ourselves over and over again. God prepares us forgiving us.

That's why the angels sang, and the shepherds left their flocks, and the wise men made their journey. It's why a man donned a camel hair robe, grabbed his lunch of locusts, and headed off to Jordan's river banks. And, it's why we dress our children up and sing "Angels We Have Heard on High," and sing with a tear in our eye for the Hallelujah Chorus. Because in the birth of Jesus we are given the gift of forgiveness. Forgiveness for everything. Anything. All of it. Hallelujah. Be ye prepared. In the name of Jesus. Amen.