

Andrew K. Frey

Advent 2

Mark 1:1-8

**The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**

<sup>2</sup>It is written in Isaiah the prophet: **“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way”** — <sup>3</sup>**“a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”**

<sup>4</sup>**And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** <sup>5</sup>**The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.** <sup>6</sup>**John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.** <sup>7</sup>**And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.** <sup>8</sup>**I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

(NIV 84)

Expanded Outline for Mark 1:1-8. Advent 2. December 7, 2014

Theme: Your Hearts for Christmas

Its 17 days before Christmas. What’s on your to-do list—what do you have to get between now and Christmas? Let’s see, there are Christmas gifts to buy—for family, friends, and co-workers. There are parties, get-togethers, and programs to attend. Christmas cards or letters to write and send. If you are like us, you still haven’t set up any decorations yet. Perhaps you are having company this Christmas and you need to prepare for that—including all the food you are going to serve everyone; or maybe you have to prepare for a trip to someone else’s place.

All this—and more, I’m sure, on top of your already busy life. There are many things you have to do to prepare for Christmas. And we are so busy preparing for so many things during the month of December we may fail to prepare for what is important. Oh, we’ll make sure everything else is done—all the presents will be bought, all the programs will be attended, you’ll get the Christmas cards out eventually. But will you make the time to prepare your heart for Christmas? Often we may not; because sadly God and his Word often

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aren’t our top priority during this time of year. And I’m not just talking about for Christmas Eve. To be honest, it may be hard to focus on the actual worship aspect of Christmas Eve. Many parents or relatives are concerned about other things than the worship of Jesus. So it’s good to sit down and take the time to prepare our hearts and minds during the advent season—before Christ comes.

That was John the Baptist’s job. He is the one that the prophets Micah and Isaiah prophesied. **I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way** — **“a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”**

John the Baptist was the one God chose to be the forerunner of the promised Messiah. His job was to prepare the hearts and minds of the people for his coming. And how did he do that? First by pointing out the sins of the people. We don’t see it so much in our gospel for today—Mark’s version is much shorter than the others. In Matthew’s gospel John the Baptist’s first recorded words were spoken to the Pharisees and Sadducees. **You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.** These were the spiritual leaders of the people. But John wasn’t afraid to point out their sin. The Pharisees especially were notorious trumpeting their own man-made laws. They cared more about keeping up outward appearances than God’s Word. And John the Baptist didn’t hesitate to point out their sins and the wrath that would come upon them. No amount of good works would help them avert the wrath of God.

We need to understand the same thing. By nature wrath is coming upon us all. Because we were nothing but God’s enemies when we were born. There is nothing good that lives in us—we were completely dead in our transgressions and sins. And each and every day we fail to obey God’s Word. We constantly fail to live up the perfection that he depends of us. And so we deserve his wrath and punishment. **The wages of sin is death;** and not just physical death, but eternal death in hell. Yes, by nature God’s wrath is coming to us all.

That is why Christ had to come. He didn’t give up the glories and riches of heaven to hang out with us because we are such awesome people. He didn’t give up full use of his divine glory to live as a

human just so he could see what it felt like. No, he came to this world because we are sinners; because we are helpless to save ourselves. That is something we must not lose sight of as we prepare for Christ's coming at Christmas: our sins are what led Jesus to give up the glories of heaven to be born as a baby boy.

While preparing the people for the coming of Christ, John the Baptist didn't leave them to wallow in their sins. He shared with them the gospel—the good news of free forgiveness. At the time, John the Baptists was becoming quite popular. People from all over the area came to see and hear him. But John the Baptist knew that his job wasn't to become popular himself, but to point others to Jesus. So he made himself low and lifted up Christ. He said, **After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.** As great, popular, and respected as John the Baptist was, he paled in comparison to the Promised Messiah. He was so great that John wasn't even able to untie his sandals—a job reserved for the lowest of the lowly servants. Jesus was greater than John, because of who he is and what he would do.

So later on, when he saw Jesus he pointed him out to those following him, **Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.** That's the same thing that Gabriel told Mary, **he will save the people from their sins.** That is the job of Christ—to save the world from their sins. That is why he came down to this earth—to save us helpless sinners. That is the one purpose of Christ's coming—that is what makes Christmas so great.

And how did he accomplish this? By living a perfect life that we could not. Where we sin day after day, Christ not once went against God's Word. And even though he was completely innocent, he willingly took our sins upon himself on the cross so that he would become a sinner in our place, suffering through the eternal punishment that we deserve. And then he gave us that perfect life that he lived. His righteousness was credited to us. He became what we were and made us like him. So when God looks at us he doesn't see horrible miserable sinners and he declares us not guilty. That is the good news of the gospel. John the Baptist knew what Jesus would do, why he came down to this earth. So he pointed sinners to their Savior.

But that isn't the only thing that John did—he is known as John the Baptist, or better yet—John the Baptizer. John was primarily known as the one who baptized people. After he showed the people their sins and they repented then he baptized them. As we read in verse 5 about the people who went out to see him. **Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.** Why would John do this? Because their sins were forgiven—washed away through the waters of baptism. Notice how in verse four Mark says that John preached **a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** The sins of the people weighed heavily upon them, they knew of the coming wrath that they deserved. So John baptized them and their sins were forgiven—covered over and removed.

John also said about Jesus, **I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.** John was not trying to make a distinction between water baptism and Spirit baptism—they are one and the same. Rather John is saying that he is only an instrument in applying the waters of baptism; it is the Messiah who gives baptism its actual power.

And what does that power actually do? Peter mentions two gifts through baptism in Acts 2. **Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** Since, like John, we are only instruments in applying the water, the same gifts are given through the waters of baptism by the power of Christ. Baptism, then forgives our sins. In baptism our sins are washed away and we are clothed with a robe of Christ's righteousness or perfection. In baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is faith. So in baptism he works faith into our hearts and welcomes us into his family. So it comes as no surprise then that Peter says that **baptism...now saves you.** Or as Paul said to Titus about baptism, **He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.**

When our sins weigh heavily upon us, when we doubt where we stand in the eyes of God; we can look back at our baptisms and remember the blessings that God has given to us. And we are assured that our sins have been washed away—forgiven, and we have been welcomed into God's family—we are his own dear children.

Its 17 days until Christmas. Your to-do list is already full. But don't forget to do what is truly important—to prepare your hearts and minds each day. To help you do that you have to look no further than the forerunner of the Messiah—John the Baptist. He shows us that it was because of our sins that Christ had to come. We are helpless to save ourselves so Christ came down to save us. And when we fall on our knees and plead for his mercy we know that we are forgiven. We know can always fall back on the grace he gives us in baptism and know where we stand—a forgiven child of God. And when you realize this, you are prepared for his coming. Amen.