

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Second Sunday in Advent, December 9, 2018**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 272, 207:6, 63, 28, 245:6.

Lessons: Isaiah 40:1-11, Acts 19:1-10, Luke 3:1-19.

Sermon Text: Mark 1:1-8.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Word of God tells us that *“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning [the light that Jesus Christ brings into the world], so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.”* John 1:6-8 (NIV)

That man named John is the one we call

**JOHN THE BAPTIST**

- 1. He lived in the wilderness and preached God’s Word.**
- 2. His message was “repent”!**
- 3. He was not the Savior but pointed forward to the Savior.**

John was born in the hill country of Judea. His parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, a priest, were old, and past the age of normally bearing children, like Abraham and Sarah. An angel appeared to his father while he was burning incense inside the temple to tell him that their prayers had been answered and they would have a son. The angel said: *“He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* Luke 1:14-17 (NIV)

Because Zechariah didn’t believe the angel, he was unable to speak until his son was born. When the relatives wanted to name the boy Zechariah, after his father, he asked for a writing tablet and wrote “his name is John”.

John *“grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel.”* Luke 1:80 (NIV)

John had a strange appearance and life-style, living in the desert. The Gospel of Mark begins this way: *“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘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.’”* And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. *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. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 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. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”* Mark 1:1-8 (NIV)

As an adult, John preached the Law of God to show people their sins and he preached the Gospel of forgiveness and he preached preparation for the coming of the Savior, the long-promised Messiah who **“will save his people from their sins.”** Matthew 1:21 (NIV)

John’s message and calling was described hundreds of years earlier in Isaiah 40: **“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”** Isaiah 40:4-5 (NIV)

Luke also tells us: **“The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.”** Luke 3:5 (NIV)

That’s quite a road-building program! Most of you have probably seen some kind of road-building project with its heavy machinery moving huge piles of dirt and rock. But 2000 years ago, at the time of John the Baptist, road building and moving dirt was very different. People had to use hand tools – shovels and baskets or buckets. To move mountains would have been considered an impossible task with the tools they had available! The idea of leveling mountains was ridiculous. Today, of course, we would not think of such a project as impossible, but it would still take lots of work.

In his preaching, John prescribed a baptism of repentance. **“And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** Mark 1:4 (NIV)

Now think about the forgiveness of sins. Isn’t this an impossible task considering the “tools” mankind – even today has? As we stand before God there is nothing that we can do to earn or build forgiveness of our sins, just as in John’s day people couldn’t physically move mountains. And what “tools” to earn forgiveness does man have today that are different than in John’s day? None. Mankind is by nature still sinful, and is not in any way getting better and better, as some people would like to think. Every one of us must confess to original sin, as did the great king David who wrote: **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** Psalm 51:5 (NIV) Not only must we admit to original sin, but we continue to sin daily and much. We must admit that **“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”** Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)

We can’t pull ourselves out of the quicksand of sin. We can’t lift ourselves by our own bootstraps to be good, righteous, pure people before God as he demands. We can’t remove the mountains of the dirt of sin that cover us. John’s message is still timely and important for us. “Repent”! Turn from your sins! Turn to the perfection of Christ for forgiveness. Let repentance, that is, sincere sorrow over our sins, be a daily occurrence.

In the message of John’s preaching repentance of sins and the forgiveness which comes from God **“the glory of the LORD will be revealed.”** That glory was seen in Jesus Christ and his work to save his people from their sins. We find that glory, that splendor in hearing and being assured that our sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did. And believing that makes it our very own possession.

When Isaiah told us that all mankind will see the glory of the Lord, we realize that even now mankind – the world – has opportunity to see the glory of the Lord, the true God and his message. It is our calling – and the calling of every believer in Christ – to do all that we can to **“go and make disciples of all nations”** Matthew 28:19 (NIV) and to **“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”** Mark 16:15 (NIV)

On judgment day all mankind will be forced to see the glory of the Lord, completely fulfilling Isaiah’s words: **“and all mankind together will see it”** – the glory of the Lord. At that time believers will see it all in joy. Unbelievers on that day will see the Glory of the Lord to their horror and eternal damnation.

In the Old Testament there were many ritual washings, usually associated with ceremonially making someone or something clean before approaching God. Although John’s baptism followed this pattern, there was something different about John’s baptism.

Because the hearts of the people had become a desert region, they needed to be rescued. What John offered the people was not merely a ritual washing, but the gift of forgiveness. The forgiveness granted through John’s baptism was not a reward because they had repented, but a wonderful gift of God who through John’s preaching brought them to repentance and gave them a change of heart.

John’s baptism is consistently called a baptism of repentance. It was administered to adults who confessed their sins. The Baptism which Jesus commanded works and gives the forgiveness of sins as a gift which has been earned by Jesus himself. Jesus’ baptism is intended for “all nations”, including infants. The

baptism of John points forward to the winning of this precious gift through the redemption to be made through Jesus Christ. The baptism of John was preparatory just as his preaching was to prepare the way for Christ to come. The glorious fulfillment of John's preaching, as of all the Old Testament preaching, has come in and with Christ.

John's preaching was most importantly the gospel pointing forward to Jesus Christ and his great work of redemption. John did not claim to be what he was not. He was not the Christ and made it clear, that ***"After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*** Mark 1:7-8 (NIV)

Remember that it was only because of Jesus' work of redemption that John's baptism brought forgiveness of sins. God today deals with us in the same way in Word and sacrament. Without Christ this could never be accomplished. That's why John was sent – to prepare the people to receive Christ. His coming assures us this Jesus of Bethlehem and Nazareth, the Son of God, is our Savior.

John preached the Law of God urging people to repent, to turn from their sins, to bring forth fruits of faith. Such preaching shows one's sin. Would the message of "your sins are forgiven" be as meaningful, or mean anything at all if you didn't know anything about "your sins"?

When one sees and recognizes his or her sinfulness, that leads to repentance, sincere sorrow over sins. When one sees his or her own sinfulness, that makes the Gospel so much more meaningful. Because if I have no sin – or think that I have no sin or are better than other people – what do I need forgiveness of sins for? If I think I am better than others, the Gospel that Jesus died for sins is meaningless.

We must mention that not everyone appreciated the preaching and work of John. The Pharisees didn't appreciate this message. The most memorable feature of the Pharisees was their feelings of superiority over others. Matthew tells us: ***"But when [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 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. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'"*** Matthew 3:7-12 (NIV)

In this way, too, the message of John was again pointing forward to Jesus Christ and his work as the Redeemer of all mankind.

The Advent season is the time of year that we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, our Savior,

John's message is as timely and as important today as when he first preached it. Every day we must remember John's message: repent, believe the Gospel, and put all your confidence in Jesus Christ, so that we, too, may ***"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance."*** Matthew 3:8 (NIV) Amen.