

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • DECEMBER 9, 2018**  
**THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**Advent Litany**  
*From Luke 1*

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who looks on us with favor.

**The people are redeemed and shown the promised mercy of our ancestors.**

God remembers the holy covenant and raises up the prophet in the wilderness.

**He prepares the way for the Lord Most High,  
giving knowledge of salvation and forgiveness.**

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn will break upon us.

**The light will guide our feet to peace, and we will rise from darkness.**

**The Scripture**  
Luke 3:2b-6

*The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*

**The Message**  
***Sealed in Peace***  
**Nick Larson**

Advent is a season of preparation. At home, people are cleaning, getting out their Christmas decorations, purchasing a tree, hanging lights on their gutters, baking, hosting, attending parties, and simply getting ready for Christmas. But into our Advent 'busy-ness' this week enters John the Baptist. He interrupts our schedules and demands that preparations of a different kind be made. John demands that we get ready, not with lights, but for Jesus. Before we can bask in Christmas joy and the birth of a special baby, John forces us to examine ourselves and our world. In the style of Old Testament prophets before him, John challenges Advent people with a message of personal and corporate self-examination. Advent, John reminds us, is a time to prepare to welcome Jesus and not simply our invited Christmas dinner guests.

When I was little, my Dad insisted we did our chores around the house before we did anything else, anything remotely fun. I remember scrubbing baseboards on my hands and knees just praying that they would be clean enough to pass inspection. I remember thinking, what does it really matter; they will just get dirty throughout the week, so that I will have to clean them again next Saturday. But no, my Dad was a stickler, and he wanted it to be spotless.

The advent of guests often prompts the host to clean up and also to fix things. Preparing for guests is a quick way to find that extra motivation to put away the lawn furniture that hasn't been winterized or put away the last of the Halloween candy. Preparing for guests makes it seem that suddenly the countertops are too messy, the wobbly chair is inadequate, the silverware is too tarnished. Preparing for guests make you re-evaluate your surroundings.

John the Baptist was not the type of guest that would have understood that kind of preparations. He spent most of his time in the wilderness eating locusts and wild honey – after all. Hardly a guest who cares if you have dirty dishes in your sink. But even if John didn't force children to clean the baseboards before guests arrived, he did understand how a people ought to welcome their God. His bold preaching and challenging words called for all to examine their lives, their values, and their priorities. If worshipers are rightly to prepare for the Prince of Peace, they must be willing to go through the detailed preparation process just as they do when company is coming to their house.

John calls us to repent, to turn around, to face the truth that God is going to make paths straight. John is saying that God is bringing into the world, hope, peace, joy, and love. John is saying that where there are things that are high, they will be brought down; and where things are low, they will be lifted up.

God is undertaking the mission to bring peace to the whole hostile world. God wants the worldwide end of violence. God wants swords beaten into plowshares, missile silos turned into grain silos, tanks turned into planters. God wants political and spiritual disarmament, the end of back biting, angry stares, and frustration between people. God wants what John is quoting from Isaiah, to make straight the paths, raise the valleys, and level the mountains. Christ is terraforming us so that we might stop the interpersonal, international, and internal violence we commit against ourselves and one another regularly.

God does the most unexpected thing. God doesn't clean up and make everything look perfect, or come with splendor and majesty. And to break through our defenses, Christ arrives utterly defenseless. Nothing but unguarded goodness in that manger!

By entering the world utterly defenseless, Jesus disarms us. Rev. Coffin says that, “By forgiving us he relieves us, not of consequences of our sins but of the consequences of being sinners.” With no fear of condemnation, we can now make ourselves vulnerable, which is what we are yearning to be – honest, sensitive, compassionate, courageous, at peace. No longer isolated by the fear we constantly feel and the fear we inspire, we can be ready now for substantial relations with one another and with God.

Peace, this vulnerability, this new-found honesty with ourselves is not something we are asked to create. This is not another chore to complete or task to do to prepare for dinner guests. We do not have to level mountains or make straight the paths. Christ is the one who is doing that work! Peace is not something we are called on to create; it is something we are called to recognize is available to us even now. And Christ at Christmas enters this world to reconcile its warring factions, to say to us, “Will you stop putting asunder what God has joined together?”

We laugh because that doesn't seem like how you make peace, whether between individuals, or between nations. Yet, Christ's grace is all we need. Power comes to its full strength in weakness. What appears to be psychological defeat is spiritual victory, for again we are talking of honesty, sensitivity, compassion, and courage. We are talking of peace, the type of peace that Christ offers that surpasses all understanding – peace where retributive violence is unnecessary and unwelcome.

By contrast, peace in the world is often referred to as accepting the outcome. Peace in society is knowing the outcome and being okay with it. Peace in culture comes through defeat, you are at peace once you defeat your enemies (or are defeated).

Yet Christ is offering a strength greater than the strength of the strong, the victory in culture, as the world judges strength. Were the nations to vie in 'weakness,' then we would see the power of God at work! For God's strength is victory over the self. It is the sense of conquest without the humiliation of the conquered.

Jesus is coming utterly defenseless into our hostile world, once more in a few weeks, and it has changed the premise of human relations. We have only to recognize it. And we can, because we are not experts. We're Christians. So, let's let go our defenses, which only make for war, and let God create in their stead that Holy Harmony. Love in that stable will be born, into our hearts to flow, innocent dreaming babe, creating in us a peace.

Remember, the Word of God came not to all those in political power, foreign or domestic, or religious power, new or old, but to John in the wilderness, the lowly son of a priest. The story of John the Baptist shows that those furthest from the seat of power are often nearer to the heart of things. It shows us that authority springs from integrity not power.

Christ coming to make straight the path is not God seeking to overcome selfishness by appealing to selfish motives. God seeks to captivate our hearts, not conquer them. God seeks to open our minds, not crack our skulls. We, of course, will continue to miss this as we always have, but the contest between God and us is not one of power – only of endurance. God will show us that true conquerors are not those who can inflict the most, but those who suffer the most. God is coming to show us that love never ends. By its very nature, it never ceases to take risks. God risked it all coming in.

So, may the Word of God, which came to John, son of Zechariah, in the wilderness, come also to you. In this season of births and rebirths, may the word that calls forth shoots from dead stumps, a people from dry bones, sons and daughters from the stones at our feet, babies from barren wombs, and life from the tomb – may this word, which is stronger than strength, mightier than might, seal in each you a new peaceful creation.