

Matthew 3:1-12

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Matthew 3:1-12, 2016

The reading from Isaiah and the Gospel reading from Matthew fit together really well this weekend,

and into the context of the Advent season they fit in the expectation of the coming of Jesus.

In both of these passages the earliest Christians would have heard echoes of the prophesy of the life of Jesus.

I want to take a look at the Isaiah passage first and the themes that are presented.

Isaiah, we must remember here, is talking for God. He begins his discourse that our passage is a part of back in Chapter 12:24 saying,

“Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts:”

This is a discourse is about the repentance of Israel, finally turning from the one who had defeated them and who they have come to rely on, and back to the mighty God.

God says, don't be afraid of the Assyrians who beat you as the Egyptians did. The Lord is coming and on that day his burden and yoke will be removed from your shoulder and neck.

A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

As you read on in the passage you catch a glimpse of the life of Jesus.

“The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him”

There you are taken to the story of Jesus’ baptism,

“...suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.”

and it is interesting that we find in the rest of that verse words used in our own baptism service.

“Sustain this child with the gift of your Holy Spirit:
The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord”

Isaiah’s words are words of hope to Israel that ties their future with the historic patriarch of the past Jesse, King David’s father in the family line of Jesus,

And they are words of hope for us today.

Matthew 1:6, 16-17: An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham...Jesse the father of King David...and at the last generation,

Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.”

I also noticed here that Isaiah speaks of the character of Jesus' ministry:

...he doesn't judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness...and equity,
righteousness and faithfulness shall be the belts he wears.

The one who is coming, who we know as Jesus, doesn't see just through his own eyes and hear through his own ears,

but through the filter of God's righteousness he brings into the world and gives us through his suffering and death.

This is how Jesus carried out his ministry. He saw people for who they were,

took people where they were in life and loved them,
whether they were sick, well, rich or poor he saw what was lacking in their life and restored them and called them to repentance.

He continues to do that today through the words prepared for us that points to the coming reign of God read through our Christian lens that is the coming of Christ.

We hear a call to repentance today.

Repent, For the kingdom of God has come near!

But what is this repentance?

Is it feeling sorry for mistakes?—trying to do better, be better?—feeling guilty?

Do we need to repent now that we are saved by the death and resurrection of Christ,
and baptized into that death and resurrection?

The Old Testament and New Testament use different words that are translated “repent.”

In the OT the word conveys a turning in another direction, doing an about face and returning to covenant fidelity
a return to living in the promises of God.

It is manifest in actions and living life consistent with God’s given to Israel.

The NT understanding of repentance entails acknowledging sin and turning away from everything that gets in the way of wholehearted devotion to God,

and turning to God with renewed trust and obedience.

Repentance is not about our standards of moral worthiness, but God’s desire to forgive our sin and realign our lives so they are in accord with the life of Jesus,

so that you see and hear with his eyes and ears.

It is about God’s power to transform us into Christ’s image and the world into a place fit for Christ to dwell.

Repentance in the NT is closely aligned with conversion and is manifest, made real and visible in our baptism.

We repent as we remember and affirm our new identity in baptism, buried and raised with Christ.

This new baptism that John speaks of,

Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, is more than a symbol of our own efforts to live according to God's will.

It represents God's act of fully claiming you for a new life in Christ.

And so, we find ourselves in the season of Advent, a season unknown to our culture wrapped up in the warm fuzzy feelings of preparation for Christmas,

a holiday lacking emphasis on the coming of Jesus in the way it is expressed by that same culture,

rather than conveying the full picture of what God has done for us in becoming fully human.

Advent is not about nostalgia or memory filtered through disproportionate emotion.

Advent faith is memory filtered through appropriate gratitude, gratitude to God for becoming truly human in the body and blood of Jesus,

for suffering and dying, for raising Jesus again.

That is what this season of Advent is about, gratitude and celebrating the coming life God shall give the world.

“A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

In the peace that follows the entire creation will participate.