

Coming Means Preparing
Luke 3:1-20

Darla's mom calls just after lunch to announce that they will be at our place around 5:30 and plan to spend the night. I overhear the conversation and realize it will be dark by then. Feeling helpful I volunteer to turn on the outside light in preparation for their arrival. Then I ask, "Is there anything else we need to do?" Of course, this is a made up story. Would I really think about needing to do anything to prepare?

It is a true story that shortly after we were married, I would see Darla pull out the vacuum and ask, "Who's coming over?" The way I remember my childhood, that was the only time the vacuum came out – when company was coming. It didn't take too long for me to figure out that vacuuming would be a weekly occurrence in our home, not just when someone was coming over.

Something else I have learned is that coming means preparing. If we did get that phone call, the vacuum would come out again, we would put clean sheets on their bed, and we would come up with a plan for supper. Coming means preparing.

The same is true in the Church. Advent means coming, and coming means preparing. In the Announcer you can read about preparing for the cookie and candy sale. It's going to take people to make the tasty treats. It's also important to get the word out so people show up to buy the goodies. There is an announcement about poinsettias – signing up them as we prepare to decorate the sanctuary with them. There is a message about children's Christmas program practice – that they are preparing to share with us the joy of Christ's birth as

they wear their costumes, sing their songs, and read words of Scripture.

That is really where we should really turn – to Scripture – if we truly want to be prepared for Christ's coming. Advent means coming, and coming means preparing.

As Advent begins, we have readings about Jesus' second coming to judge both the living and the dead. Then we have a couple of Sundays of John the Baptist. And then we wrap it up with the coming of the Christ Child.

God wants His people to be ready for Jesus' coming, and so He sends John the Baptist. *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, ... the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

Isaiah prophesied concerning John with these words, *The voice of one crying 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 become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

John's message was clear and hard, *You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

That got their attention! God's word is powerful. It created repentance and faith in their hearts. They responded by asking, *What then shall we do?* We heard John's answer to soldiers, tax collectors, and those with a degree of wealth. They were to share with those in need. The tax collectors were to be honest in their dealings. The soldiers were to be faithful to their duties and content with their pay.

John's message was so clear and powerful that some wondered *if he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

Jesus will come all cute and cuddly wrapped in swaddling clothes, but He will also come again as judge to gather into His barn or burn with unquenchable fire. Advent means coming, and coming means preparing.

What should we be doing to prepare for Christ's coming? Anything? ... There are plenty of excuses to do nothing. Some of them even sound quite pious:

"Well, the Bible says all of our righteous deeds are like filthy rags, so why even try?" ... It is true that God does not need our good works. But is also true that our neighbor does. God call us to show our love for Him by doing acts of service for those around us.

Someone else might say, "The purpose of the Law is to accuse and condemn us. We can't do anything to save ourselves, God

does it for us. So we don't really need to do anything besides let Jesus do the preparing for us."

There is some truth to that statement. Jesus did prepare everything for our salvation. It was His perfect obedience that fulfilled God's Law in our place. It is as John the Baptist proclaimed, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He would do that by taking your sin on Himself and dying for it on His cross. He suffered the wrath of God for you, and gives you the forgiveness of sins without any action on your part. He works through His word to create faith in you, and faith in Jesus brings the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

God is responsible for saving us through the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit. But you are also responsible. You are responsible to those around you – to use what God has given you for their benefit.

God has called some of you to be a husband or wife. You are responsible to be faithful to your spouse and love God and that person by serving his or her needs.

God has called some of you to be parents. You have a responsibility to provide for your children, including providing for their Christian upbringing. All of us are children. We have parents to love, honor, obey. Some of you work for others. John's words to be faithful in service and content with your pay apply. All of us have some way of serving those around us. He has blessed us in so many ways.

Advent means what? Coming! Jesus is coming, and coming means preparing. You have some preparing to do! Amen.