

King of Glory Lutheran Church  
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Year A: Advent 2: Matthew 3:1-12  
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***Matthew 3:1-12***

*1 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,  
2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." 3 This 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." 4 Now John  
wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food  
was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were  
going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, 6 and they were baptized by  
him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But 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? 8 Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 9  
Do 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. 10 Even 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. 11 "I 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. 12  
His 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."*

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness...

The definition of wilderness is a "natural uncultivated land." Perhaps when you hear the word "wilderness" you picture the mountains or the desert, some place remote and empty of people.

But we also use the word "wilderness" to describe an "uncomfortable situation." To be in the wilderness does not only have to describe a place, but an experience that is overwhelming or disorienting.

An example: For the first 22 years of my life I lived on the west coast, in California and Washington. The weather was mild on the west coast in those days.

And then I moved to Washington DC. Summers were hot and humid and winters were cold and snowy.

Now when I lived in Washington DC I had four roommates all of whom were from the Midwest. And they thought I was a wimp because I didn't like snow or understand it.

Well my first winter in Washington DC there was a big snowstorm. It hit on a Monday morning. I woke up, got ready for work as usual and left the house to walk to the metro, which was a mile away. I trudged through snow and was completely exhausted by the time I got to the train. But I kept telling myself, Deb, you are no wimp, you can get through this snow.

And when I got on the train it was eerily quiet, no people. And then when I got to my stop and trudged again through the snow to my office the streets were empty. But every time I thought about turning around, I told myself that I could handle it, I could make it through the snow, I was no wimp. I was going to make it through this winter wilderness.

When I finally got to my office and was just sitting down, grateful to be in a warm dry place, the phone rang (this was in the days before cell phones were common). My roommates were calling, "Deb, where are you? We are so worried? What made you think you should go out in this storm alone? The entire city is shut down! Turn around and come home."

That day in my wilderness the voice crying out over the phone told me to turn around and come home. That voice gave me a new perspective and the guidance I needed, not to mention teaching me something about humility in the face of a snowstorm.

What about you? Have you every found yourself wandering in the wilderness? A wilderness in the mountains or a city? Or the kind of wilderness we have all been in: uncomfortable, disoriented or overwhelmed in your heart, mind or body?

We know wilderness. And because we have all found ourselves in the wilderness we also know the power of a voice calling out to us.

Today in our gospel reading from the gospel of Matthew we meet John the Baptist.

“In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”

This is the way that John prepared for Jesus out there in the wilderness. He called for repentance, for people to turn around, to see the home God was and is creating for all people.

When John called for the people to repent he was shaking everything up, calling for people to notice what was happening around them, inviting them to be changed.

Repentance is about recognizing where you have been and where God is calling you to go and who God is calling you to be.

So John’s voice calls out to us today to shake us up, to change our perspective, to help us see the wilderness we might be in, and show us a new direction.

God knows that we can’t find our way out of our wilderness places alone. We need the voice of one crying out to help us find our way. We need God’s love and forgiveness to show us how to turn around and move forward.

We are reminded today that Jesus did not appear out of thin air either on Christmas or at the Jordan River. He was part of a community and a family. He was born on Christmas to Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds and the angels welcomed him. And when his ministry began with his baptism at the Jordan River, Jesus was met there by John who had been preparing people in the wilderness for the new kingdom Jesus would bring into the world.

And so in this season of Advent, this season of waiting and preparing John speaks to us as well, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near!” “Change your life, God’s kingdom is here!” Or in the words of my roommates, “Turn around, come home!”

So how will we hear John’s call today? How will we experience repentance? How will we prepare the way for Jesus and be a part of his work and his ministry?

You have been given a paper with some questions on it. This exercise was proposed a few years ago by David Lose, pastor and writer. And I think it will help us prepare the way for Jesus.

So here is what I would like you to do.

First, make an Advent "to do" list of things you need and want to get done before Christmas. Write as many things down as you want. Shopping, baking, concerts, daily devotions, whatever comes to mind. I'll give you 30 seconds.

Next think about, and if you wish, write down a word or sentence that describes what you want Christmas to be like. Dream about your hope for Christmas for yourself, and for your friends, family, and the world. Maybe you hope for peace on earth, especially in your home. Food for the hungry. Comfort for those in pain. I'll give you another 30 seconds.

Now, we are going to work backwards. Go back to your Advent to do list and circle those things that will contribute to your Christmas hope. I'll give you another 30 seconds.

What things on your to do list are important for your larger vision and hope for Christmas? Maybe now there are some things you would like to add to your list in light of your Christmas hope? Maybe there are some things that you can let go of?

Focusing on the hope you have for this Christmas just might change your actions in the days ahead and give you a new perspective and purpose.

Wherever you find yourself today, whatever hopes and dreams you have for this Christmas, hear this good news, God meets you in your wilderness. God knows where you have been and where you are right now. And God calls you today to repent, to change your perspective, to turn around and get ready for the world to be transformed by love.

This Advent season is for us a time of preparation as we prepare the way for Jesus. Today, we are invited to check in with ourselves about where we are, what we are doing and find out if we need to be shaken up, change our perspective, turn and move towards those people and things and practices that matter most.

This is not easy work. Repentance changes us. Preparing the way for Jesus and being a part of his ministry demands our whole lives. And through the preparation, the service, and the work we participate in, we look always to the love and hope we know in God who gives us the wisdom and strength we need this season and every season.

Live into your Christmas hope and prepare the way of the Lord! Amen.