

Luke 3:1-6 Hear the Advent Voice of John the Baptist! Advent 2 Dec. 6-7, 2015

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

God's grace and peace are yours as you receive His Word of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Luke 3:1-6 focuses on the message of John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord to come to us! These are Your words heavenly Father to keep our hearts listening to Your truth. Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear Christians, called to repentance,

People have a variety of voices. Some talk in high voices and others talk with low voices. Some talk softly and others quite loud. I would think that God gave John the Baptist a louder and lower voice so crowds who came to him in the open areas of the wilderness could easily hear him. He had quite a following: people from Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and even nomads in the desert. They didn't come just to hear his voice: they came to hear his message. They could tell that he was a prophet. He spoke with authority from God. His words and his austere appearance worked in harmony to call people to repentance before the coming of God's kingdom and its King. Today let us:

Hear the Advent Voice of John the Baptist!

First, his voice proclaimed God's law. In the middle of all that was going on with Tiberius the Roman emperor and with the rulers of the region and with the religious leaders in Jerusalem, God sent John. God works in mysterious ways. He called John not to go to the capital of Jerusalem or to preach to the temple. God called him to the wilderness along the Jordan river. You would think that he would have only a few followers in such remote places, but people came from over 100 miles and journeyed for a week just to see John. It wasn't that they came to see some kind of a freak, although he must have been quite a sight with rough camel's hair clothes and appearance. They came to listen. People whose hearts were filled with grief over their sin and whose consciences were bruised came for healing. Many of these people had been told by the Pharisees of their time to deal with their sin by doing good works. But, their works didn't ease their consciences.

John was called by God to speak plainly about their needs. Like a doctor, John identified the source of their problem of sin before offering the medicine of forgiveness to heal them. Luke wrote, "*The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance....*" (v.2-3)

What does repentance mean? Repent means to have a change of mind and heart. It means to turn from the direction of sin to God's ways. Luke quoted phrases from Isaiah to describe what obstacles hinder people from turning to God. "*Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.*"(v.5)

Isaiah described spiritual valleys. At times even believers can desire the evil of sin more than we love God. Paul wrote, "*The good I want to do, I don't do. The evil I do not want to do, that I keep doing!*" (Romans 7:19) Instead of trusting God fully, we can doubt His plan when things don't go the way we expect. At times we have a false humility despairing about troubles in life thinking that God can't help us rather than trusting in Him.

Isaiah also described mountains and hills. This pictured sinful pride and self-righteousness. Deep down we don't want to admit that we need God's strength. The mountains picture how we want to let our reason rule rather than listen to God's wisdom. The crooked places also reflect how far from perfect our lives have been. God's path leads straight to Jesus. But, our path takes every detour and turn into sin that

hinders our walk with Jesus. We have failed to serve our God as we should. At times, we have made light of the saving grace of God and used it as an excuse to break His laws without shame. Is this how we show love for our God? We truly do not deserve God's love. If we were ignorant of God's truths and sinned, our punishment would be small. But we know the truth and yet, too often we sin against God and it doesn't bother us. God is like a generous rich person who gives each of us \$1,000's as gifts. But, we're not satisfied. We want more from Him in our time and in our way. How ungrateful we have been to our loving God! How callous we have become as we forget that every sin we commit caused our Savior to suffer even more while on the cross. He died not so that we continue to sin, but that we might be God's people and live with Him in His kingdom. But without repentance, we are not going to benefit from His death. We are going to die in our sins just like so many outwardly religious people of John's time. Inwardly they had no sorrow for sin or faith in God. This was message of John's voice to identify the spiritual problems for people for his time and for us today!

Second, John's voice prepared the way for our Savior. Luke quoted Isaiah, "*A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'*" (v.4) John's preaching of repentance was not so we could prepare ourselves for God. That is impossible! It was so the way would be prepared for the Lord to come to us!

We can't move mountains of sinful pride. We can't fill in valleys of doubt. Only God's Word can prepare us so that Christ comes into our hearts and personally takes away our sins. No sin is too small that we shouldn't repent of it. And no sin is too large that it can't be forgiven! Jesus not only died, He continues to live as our risen Lord who comes to save us. Isaiah's prophecy of the Lord's rescue was fulfilled in three ways. He wrote to believing Jews who had been taken captive to Babylon to assure them that God was preparing a way for them to return to the Promised Land. And Christ would be born there to save them. Isaiah's prophecy also referred to Jesus' incarnation to live a perfect life and set us free from sin by His death. Jesus sent out His disciples to all nations with the saving news, as Isaiah wrote, "*All mankind will see God's salvation.*" (v.6) The news was no longer limited to the Jews, but for all people. The last fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy would come on judgment day when Christ would return to bring all believers safely to heaven.

Christ certainly comes to us through God's Word of the Gospel. Luke also mentions another way that Christ comes to us. God called John to preach "*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" (v.3) Those who came to him and were moved by God to repent were baptized, receiving the forgiveness of sins. This was a personal way of applying the Gospel to those who repented that their sins would truly be washed away by the coming Savior. Our baptism today is different since Christ has come. It is still a means that God uses to personally bring to us the full forgiveness that Christ won on the cross. Our baptism is based on Christ's completed work to save us. Baptism is God's delivery system of forgiveness from Christ's cross to each of our hearts. Through the powerful Word of the Gospel the Holy Spirit comes to the hearts of those baptized and gives them a new spiritual life. Some of us were baptized a short time ago and others many years ago. Even to this day, as we look back at what God did at our baptisms, it should give us power to daily turn from our sins so we can receive our loving Savior and His forgiveness with open arms.

Jesus' ministry was a great success among the people who had been called to repentance through John. Many of Jesus' close disciples had first been baptized by John. Many other followers gladly trusted in Jesus and brought more people to hear His message because of John. May the voice of John, that is, the Word of God that he proclaimed still be heard by us and be taken into our hearts so that we daily repent and trust in Christ who set us free from sin that we might live with Him forever! Amen.