

2 S. in Advent 12/9/18
St. Luke 3:1-20 C

TEXT: IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM 3RD
CHAPTER OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

Well, it's the 2nd Sunday in Advent and that means the voice of one crying in the wilderness, John the Baptizer, is going to be preaching to you and his message is this: "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 with fire (v. 16)."

John's message is the message of the season of Advent: The Lord Jesus is coming and you need to be ready for His coming. And, John tells you why: He is going to lay His axe to the root of every tree and every tree that does not bear good fruit is going to cut down and thrown into the fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand and He is going to use it to separate His wheat from the chaff. He will gather His wheat into His barn; that means He will take all who believe in Him to be with Him in heaven. The chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire; that means the unbelievers will go to the shame and torment of hell forever.

That is what will happen when Christ comes to be our Judge on the last day. You need to be ready for it. So, the question for us is: What then shall we do? That is an excellent question. It is excellent because you want to be ready when the Lord Jesus comes, so what then shall we do?

You could do what we talked about Wednesday night: You could pat yourself on the back because you have not failed like your neighbor has. You can laugh, even if it's just on the inside, at your neighbor's words, quarks, clothes, ugly sins. You can just think that you are better than someone else; more pious, more deserving of God's grace and favor than

someone else. That is as good as having Abraham for your father.

You can do that, but there is a big problem with it. Back in John's day, there were people coming out to him with the same attitude. So, before they could say anything, John said to them, "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" (v. 8). In other words, just because you are Abraham's offspring, just because you think you are better than someone else; more pious, more deserving of God's grace and favor, doesn't mean you are ready for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the question remains: What then shall we do? Perhaps, the easiest thing to do is to silence the voice. After all, that John the Baptist has a lot of nerve, doesn't he? Coming to us on the 2nd Sunday in Advent, telling us how bad we are, that we are a brood of vipers, the children of the devil, as we are busy decking the halls with balls of holly. Who does this guy think he is telling us how to live our lives? So, we could follow in the footsteps of Herod the tetrarch and try to silence the voice. You remember what he did, don't you? When John pointed out his sin of adultery with his brother's wife and a lot of other evil things, Herod didn't take it. He took John and threw him in prison. Problem solved.

We could do the same thing – follow in Herod's footsteps and try to silence the voice – except for a couple of things. It has been a couple of thousands since Herod threw John in prison and chopped off his head. Yet, here we are, the 2nd Sunday in Advent 2018, and what's happening? John is still down at the Jordan, still in our ears, still preaching the same message to us. The point is this: You can't silence the voice. He's still speaking.

What then shall we do? Let's try a different approach. Bear fruits in

keeping with repentance. Change your mind. Change your heart. Change your life. That's the way to prepare for the coming of your Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what we should be doing. But, in and of ourselves, we would never do that. We don't want to do that. We are a brood of vipers. Children of the devil. And as such, we are set against God, against His will and His ways.

But, the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that God is not against us. "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts," through the prophet Malachi (3:7b)." That's why every year since the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Yahweh's messenger has come and prepared the way for the Messiah with words like wrath, and judgment, the axe being laid to the root of trees, winnowing fork, calling us a brood of viper, and speaking of unquenchable fire.

John comes and speaks his words to us and it just happens. The Holy Spirit – the One who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies us in the Christian faith – returns to us through the preaching of John and works it into our hearts so that we say, "John is right – I am an offspring of the devil. I am a poor, miserable sinner. I have not loved God or my neighbor. I deserve His wrath, His punishment, His winnowing fork, His unquenchable fire. What then shall I do?"

The answer is: You're doing what needs doing. You're repenting. Not because it was your idea, but because the Holy Spirit has brought you to the point when you can say to God, "I have sinned. What then shall I do?"

What happens is marvelous – we see the salvation of our God. That salvation comes to us in the person and work of the one mightier than

John; the one whose sandals John is not worthy to stoop down and untie. God's salvation comes to us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ as He is born in that Bethlehem stable. Jesus, who was baptized with Holy Spirit and with fire.

It happened like this: When John was baptizing by the Jordan, Jesus Himself came down and was baptized. And the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down anointing Him for His ministry. From that point, Jesus went out proclaiming the Kingdom of God and freeing God's creatures and creation from the oppression of Satan. And the fire began to fall on that Thursday night, as Judas betrayed Him, the 11 left Him, Peter denied Him, the Sanhedrin condemned Him. On Friday, the fire continued to fall as the crowd cried out to release Barabbas and crucify Him, as Pilate pronounced the sentence, as the soldiers crowned Him with a crown of thorns and nailed Him to the tree of the cross. There, Jesus suffered and for you. The axe of God's wrath and anger was poured out on Jesus.

Which means that you are no longer a brood of vipers. You are a child of God. Forgiven and restored. Brought into His fold. You are His children who are prepared for His coming by bearing fruit in keeping with repentance.

What then shall we do? Those who have clothing and food share with those who have none. The tax collectors collect only what is required; in other words, they are not padding their own pockets by collecting more for themselves. The soldiers, too, are content with their wages and not use their vocation to steal from their neighbor.

The same thing that happened at the Jordan is happening here. The Holy Spirit, by Word and Sacrament, has brought you to repentance so that you bear fruit in keeping with repentance as you love God and your

neighbor. Parents and grandparents, love your children and grandchildren. Children, honor and obey those God has placed in authority over you, your parents, your teachers, your coaches, your bus driver. If you have food and clothing and money, God has given you extra so that you can share with your neighbor. Lead a sexually pure and decent life, and love and cherish your husband or wife. Speak well of your neighbor, and explain everything in the kindest way. Be content with the life and stuff and abilities and opportunities God had given you.

What then shall we do? The answer is very simple: Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. That's what you are doing because the Holy Spirit has worked through the preaching of John the Baptist such that now you are bearing fruit in keeping with repentance.

So, we pray, Come Lord Jesus, for you have made us ready.