

“Prepare for Arrival”

Mark 1:1–8

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In today’s Scripture, John the Baptist is urging us to get ready. He says, “*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*” John the Baptist knew what our Advent theme, *Someone Is Coming*, is all about. Last Sunday, one of the children told me that she is waiting for Santa Claus because she expects Santa to bring a *gift* to her. I assume that Santa must be under enormous stress because of the many demands from children! We might change next year’s Advent theme to “Someone is coming to bring a great gift. Otherwise, I will *not* be happy!” Truly, during the Advent season, we are waiting for Christ, the love of God, in the birth of Jesus. Love is a true gift! No matter who you are waiting for, whether Jesus or Santa, it is joyful and exciting news that someone is coming to give us a gift! As we know, one of our Christmas songs says, “Christmas, it is one of the most of wonderful times of the year”!

I am not talking about the gifts that will be forgotten after Christmas. Last year, around the Christmas season, Youngjae and I bought a couple of Christmas gifts and made a special effort to wrap the gifts for our boys. We hid them in our room. Jacob complained to us about our house chimney being blocked off. He was deeply concerned that Santa could not come down to him if the fireplace was not opened up. He told us that he wouldn’t go to bed because he wanted to meet Santa on Christmas Eve! I said to him that Santa would not come in the house when anyone is awake. He is a secret agent of God! And then Jacob was able to go to bed. The day after, on Christmas morning, Jacob and Joshua were so excited to see the wrapped gifts. We were happy because they were happy! However, their excitement didn’t last long. After they had played with their toys for a couple of days, they told us their Christmas gift wishes for next year!

Why did their Christmas excitement disappear? Because they didn’t have time to prepare themselves to receive the gifts! Their eagerness and interest was only about the gifts that they could enjoy! In today’s Scripture, John the Baptist proclaimed in the wilderness, “for God’s arrival! Make the road smooth and straight! The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I’m a mere stagehand, will change your life. I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out.” (*The Message*). Why does he challenge us to welcome “someone” who is bringing God’s special gift? How do we prepare? He talks about three things. First, he calls us to get back to

essentials; second, to turn our lives around; and last, to get ourselves out of the way to clear the way for God.

Let us go deeper. What is essential in our lives? Do we get what John the Baptist was talking about? Today's Scripture reading begins with this sentence: *The good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!* John the Baptist is not talking about fake news but true words! John the Baptist is a witness to the good news that will change people's hearts and lives! Imagine or recall the best news you ever received that changed your life when you heard it. The good news in Christian faith does not mean an enrichment of your moral life. The essential Christian teachings do not make this world a better place politically. Nor do they educate people to be spiritually wise and mature through Jesus' teachings. No. These are not essential to Christian faith. The ultimate purpose of Christianity is to spread the good news of God to all people, which will completely change people's lives, perspectives, and even lifestyles. The answer is simple and very clear. It is about eternal life! C. S. Lewis describes the good news of Christian faith metaphorically in his book *Mere Christianity*:

This world is a great sculptor's shop. We are the statues and there's a rumor going around the shop that some of us are someday going to come to life.¹

If the good news remains merely the fun things that we enjoy to satisfy our emotional and bodily needs, that is *not* what John the Baptist is proclaiming in the wilderness. Pursuing pleasure is not the purpose of spreading the good news of Christ. What C. S. Lewis tells us about transforming statues into living people is about gaining a new life through hearing the good news of life transformation. Clearly, Lewis is not talking about the transformation of our biological life—*Bios*—but about our spiritual life—*Zoe*.² We are not statues, but we gain eternity as children of God. We are not only a physical body but a shadow of all of life. The spiritual life is bigger! In other words, when we accept and welcome Jesus Christ, we will be transformed into a new person who receives eternity in God. Isn't this incredible news? Pursuing eternal life is one of the essentials for all Christ believers. John the Baptist is urging us to hear this good news and believe it!

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper Collins: 2001), 158–59.

² “The Biological sort which comes to us through Nature, and which (like everything else in Nature) is always tending to rundown and decay so that it can only be kept up by incessant subsidies from Nature in the form of air, water, food, etc., is *Bios*. The Spiritual life which is in God from all eternity and which made the whole natural universe, is *Zoe*. *Bios* has, to be sure, a certain shadowy or symbolic resemblance to *Zoe*.” C. S. Lewis, “Spiritual life: statues becoming real,” *Mere C. S. Lewis*, <http://merecslewis.blogspot.com/2011/01/spiritual-life-statues-becoming-real.html>, accessed Dec. 8 2017.

In order to hear and receive this good news for transforming our lives, we need to turn our lives around first. You need to determine for yourself and make your choice. John the Baptist uses a somewhat harsh expression, “Repentance for the forgiveness of sin!” Eugene Peterson, in his book *The Message*, paraphrases this sentence this way: “Life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins.” You have to make your own decision. Jesus never preached for our information and knowledge. He preached to make his disciples accept the good news about transforming their lives as children of God. The whole Bible teaches us about life transformations. Hearing the good news is to rediscover joy in our hearts! It is a great joy to be born again as a child of God. In this season, waiting and welcoming Christ in the baby Jesus is to have reassurance of this great joy that will never be forgotten! And Christ is coming to bring this joy to us! Pastor Rick Warren shares in his book *Choose Joy: Because Happiness Isn't Enough*, “Joy begins with our convictions about spiritual truths that we’re willing to bet our lives on, and truths that are lodged so deeply within us that they produce a settled assurance about God.”³ Choose life and discover joy through your decision to turn your lives around and stay in tune with God! Henry Nouwen, a Christian spiritual master, says, “Joy simply doesn’t happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.”⁴

Lastly, John urges us to “make His path straight.” John’s call sounds a lot like what expectant parents have to do to prepare for a baby. Actually, this reminds me of an experience I had when Jacob was born. Some of you may remember my experience as a new father. After five days at the hospital, Youngjae and I had to bring newborn baby Jacob home. As a brand new parent with a little tiny baby, I was very nervous and anxious. To be honest with you, I put my emergency blinkers on while I was driving from Mercy General Hospital back home. Literally, I made my path straight! And people helped me out by making my road clear! This baby truly changed my life and direction! While baby Jacob was sleeping, we carefully looked at him. I can’t forget the moment I saw tears in Youngjae’s eyes. I also became emotional with teary eyes. I experienced the good news that changed me completely.

Friends, in this holy and special season of the year, a baby is coming to change your life. Do not be afraid, but rejoice! Let him come, and turn on your emergency blinkers. This is the basic, essential news that we want to hear with excitement and in joy on this Second Advent Sunday. Amen.

³ Kay Warren, *Choose Joy* (Bakers Publishing: 2012) 100

⁴ Henry J.M Nouwen, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit* (Crossroad Publishing: 1994) an excerpt from Chapter II: *Joy One: Joy and Sorrow*

