



**SAINT JAMES'**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
Fremont, California

## SERMON

7. December, 2008. Advent II

Title: "Prepare the Way of the Lord!"

Text: St. Mark 1:1-9

J.J.

### KID'S KORNER OUTLINE

- What is Baptism?
- Do any of you remember when you were baptized?
- A couple of weeks ago, On November 2nd, Samantha and Rachel Herrick were baptized. Were any of you here for that.
- Follow me!
- Right here (standing at the Baptismal Bowl), I asked Samantha and Rachel some important questions . . . and not only them, but all of us.
- At every and all Baptisms, we also renew our own Baptismal promises.
- Whoops . . . what promises?
  - Celebrant* Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
  - People* I will, with God's help.
  - Celebrant* Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
  - People* I will, with God's help.
  - Celebrant* Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
  - People* I will, with God's help.
- Baptism is important as it makes us part of God's family.
- Now, to remember our baptisms, all of us, Kathy and I asked that the Baptismal Bowl be left out all the time to be a reminder that we are part of God's family.
- And . . . what's inside the bowl? Water.
- As Kathy and I come into Church, we splash around in the water a bit to remember our Baptisms.
- And I want to invite you to do the same.
- Dip your fingers into the Baptismal water, and make the sign of the cross upon your self (something we will talk about in the next Kids Korner!).

S.D.G.



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*After the reading of the Holy Gospel, the Cantor begins to sing solo, no accompaniment:*

**Prepare ye the way of the Lord, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.**

**Prepare ye the way of the Lord\*\* Prepare ye the way of the Lord.**

*\*\* At this point the Preacher begins to preach the sermon, interrupting the singing of the song.*

*The Cantor concludes with the final "Prepare ye the way of the Lord" and then fades.*

**Listen! Do you hear it? It's the song of the prophets – "Prepare the way of the Lord." In today's Gospel, it's the voice of John the baptizer, appearing in the wilderness, proclaiming the coming of the Lord. And before John, it was the song of the prophet Isaiah: "Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God . . . Prepare the way of the Lord . . . make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3). It's the hymn of God's ancient people, declaring that "Righteousness shall go before him, and peace shall be a pathway for his feet" (Psalm 85:13) . . . the song of the early Church as they "wait for a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (II Peter 3:14). It's the proclamation of Mark, the Evangelist: This is "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (St. Mark 1:1). And, that voice . . . that song . . . that proclamation comes to us this day – "Prepare the way of the Lord!" Get ready for the coming of God into your heart and into your life.**

**If you didn't notice it, St. Mark's Gospel gets things going fast. He jumps over all of the birth stories . . . the story of Bethlehem . . . Mary and Joseph . . . the manger . . . the shepherds and the sheep . . . the angels . . . the star . . . the wisemen . . . Mark simply skips over all of that and starts his story with John: "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." This story . . . it's not a new story . . . we've heard it often . . . every Advent Season . . . a story that appears in all four Gospel accounts – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John . . . and it's an important story . . . a story important for us to hear . . . important for us to act upon. And as I hear the story, I begin to see myself in it . . . and I invite you to do the same.**

**"John the Baptizer appeared . . ." but he didn't just appear out of thin air. He had to grow up just like each one of us and come face-to-face with the struggles of life. The Evangelist, St. Luke, in his Gospel, fills us in some of that detail. Luke begins his Gospel with the story of a temple priest whose name was Zechariah, and his wife, Elizabeth. We are told they were well on in years and were childless. An angel appears to Zechariah while he's serving in the temple i.e. while he's at work. And, right then and there, of all places, the angel tells him he's going to be a daddy. And Zechariah goes into shock: "You've got to be kidding . . . at our age . . . we? Parents? I don't think so" And Zechariah is left speechless . . . literally, speechless. He cannot talk. The story would be somewhat humorous, if it were not so serious. I've often wondered how he explained all of this to Elizabeth when he got home: "Honey, I've got something to tell you" – but of course Zechariah can't say a word . . . he's literally "tongue tied." And it came to pass as the Angel had said . . . and they called their son, John. Indeed, the very same John we hear about in today's Gospel Reading.**

Now, at an early age, perhaps mid-20s or so, John leaves home. We don't know the reason for that. It might have been that his parents were no longer living, and he was on his own . . . or perhaps, like many of us in our early adult years, John might have been searching and seeking out the meaning of life, looking for answers, questioning his faith—the faith of his fathers (and literally, of his father, for he was a “preacher’s kid” and that’s never an easy role) . . . Perhaps he had seen some of the hypocrisy of the church into which he had been born; hypocrisy that left him disillusioned and cynical, as it does for many of us . . . Maybe he was tired of his church “majoring in minors” – the foolish debates between the Pharisees and the Sadducees that left him empty, like the arguments in our own church which at times threaten to divide us . . . Or, maybe he was just trying to discern the will of God for himself, like so many of us. Whatever, he ends up in the wilderness of Judea. And there, in that wilderness, John takes upon himself the role of a prophet, including the ancient vestments (the hairy clothing and the leather belt), and he calls out to any and to all who would listen to him, inviting them to turn their lives around and to reconnect their spirit with the Spirit of God. And many came to hear him, and changed their lives . . . literally, turned themselves around.

That same song comes to us this day and for the very same reason. Our own lives, at times, can be confusing and difficult, out in the wilderness in which we live. And, we, like John, look for answers, search for truth, seek out some certainty in our lives, long for peace as we try to discern the will of God for ourselves. Once again, we have come to the season of Advent . . . a time of reflection and soul searching . . . a season of preparation and getting ready . . . and not just getting ready for Christmas with its eighteen-shopping-days-left count down . . . but a time, a season to prepare ourselves . . . to get ourselves ready . . . to straighten out our paths, our highways . . . to turn ourselves around, and if necessary, to change . . . to reconnect our spirit with the Spirit of God . . . to become a new people. That’s what this season of Advent is all about. And today’s Gospel invites us to do just that. And so, look around and see . . . listen and you will hear . . . you will hear the voice of God in your sisters and brothers present here . . . the voice of God calling you . . . inviting you to be the people . . . \*\* . . . to be the person God has made you to be. (PAUSE) Ah . . . I think I hear it now . . . do you? . . . that prophetic voice of old? . . . Listen . . . and join me in singing that ancient song.

\*\* *Cantor begins singing, without accompaniment, interrupting the Preacher, singing “Prepare Ye the Way...*

Prepare ye the way of the Lord . . . Prepare ye the way of the Lord.  
Prepare ye the way of the Lord . . . Prepare ye the way of the Lord.

*The Preacher also sings and invites the congregation to join in*

Prepare ye the way of the Lord . . . Prepare ye the way of the Lord.  
Prepare ye the way of the Lord . . . Prepare ye the way of the Lord, etc. . .

S.D.G.

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