

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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December 4, 2005  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent  
Mark 1:1-8  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 40:1-11  
Psalm of the Day: *O Antiphons of Advent*  
Second Lesson: 2 Peter 3:8-14  
Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

## Listen to the Baptist's Cry

You children that are here this morning, or those of you that are older than children, you might want to think back to this. What do your parents do when they really want your attention? Does their voice change when you know it's time now that you really better listen to what they are saying, enough goofing around? Does their face get a little redder? Do the veins on their neck stand out a little bit more? Does the tone of their voice change? Does the look on their face change? Do they give you a look that tells you, "Oh, oh! I better watch what I am doing"? I have to believe that every one of us had a certain look that a mom or dad would give to us and we knew at that point in time we better sit up and listen.

It is kind of interesting how God got the people to sit up and listen, isn't it? I don't know if John the Baptist had a certain look with his face, but he had a different kind of look in his outfit, didn't he? What did we just read?—a leather belt, clothing made of camel's hair, ate bugs and honey—not nut 'n honey—bugs and honey. It's all part of God's way of saying here is something different. A guy that didn't live in the city, he lived out in the desert. It is God's way of saying, "Here is something different. Here is something I want you to listen to. I want you to listen to him so much that 700 years before he was born, I told you about him. I told you about him through the prophet Isaiah who said, 'In the desert there is going to be someone crying out prepare the way for the Lord, make a straight path for him'."

If God, seven centuries ahead of time, said, "Here is a guy you ought to listen to" and if God went to all these lengths and had John live out in the desert, dress a little different, talk differently, proclaim different things than the other religious leaders of his day, then it probably makes sense for us this morning to listen to what John the Baptist had to say—listen to God's Advent prophet, listen to God's Advent preacher, John the Baptist. As we listen closely to what he says in what we just read from the book of Mark, we hear him denouncing sin. He denounces sin—straight forward—that's what he does. But then if you also listen closely, you hear that he announces a Savior. This is how he made a straight path—he rebuked sin and he pointed to the Savior. He condemned sin and he had a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. That is the message God wanted heard because that is what makes straight paths in our hearts.

The people of John's day were a lot like us. I am sure there were people that thought they had done pretty good and God should love them because they had done a lot for God. Each and every one of us at times can fall into that way of thinking. We have a great parenting moment that is not going to show up on some highlight reel on a

television show, but we can walk away patting ourselves on the back and say, “These kids are lucky that God gave them a parent like me. They really learned something. They are doing pretty good now. If only they would listen to me more, things would go really well.” We all have our hills of pride, our mountains of pride, as we just sang about in our song. It might not be your parenting, it might be something else. It might be over the way we carry out our job or do our work. It might be the way that we are a husband or a wife. It might be just all around being a nice person that is nice to be around. God needs to level out that mountain of our pride. John needed to do it in his day and God does it through John yet today. Because we see that what God says is, “Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy.” Not “be better than Fred”. But “be holy as I the Lord your God am holy.” You and I can look around and say, “I am doing a better job at this or that than other people”, but that is not what God says. He says, “Look at me. I want you to be absolutely as perfect as I am and if you are not, the wages of sin is death, which is an eternity of death in hell.”

So God needs to knock down those hills of pride. But the valleys—people of John’s day had valleys just like you and I have valleys. Those times when we see all too clearly that we aren’t anywhere close to the holiness God demands. We see in the mirror of God’s law or we hear it from our own conscience, that we screw up, that we say things that hurt, that we do things that hurt, that we have failed as a parent, a spouse, an employer, an employee, that we have done things that we know are wrong. Then we can get down in that pit, that valley, that death of knowing what sinners we are. God wants those things filled in also.

It is filled in first of all by showing us that yes, it is sin. John denounces sin. He didn’t sugar coat it. He didn’t tell the people that everyone does it so it isn’t that big of a deal or that you are a sinner, but... He just simply proclaimed “repent”. Turn away from your sin. Acknowledge your sin. Repent. Turn away from it. Don’t excuse it. Don’t rationalize it. Repent. He had a rough look to him and he had a rough message because he called it as it was. The world is full of sinners that deserve hell. That was spoken clearly by John and it needs to be spoken clearly to our hearts today.

That is what makes it kind of amazing, doesn’t it, when you hear that all the people came from Jerusalem and from the area and came around from the different area of Judea to hear this message. You think it is the kind of thing that people would run away from, don’t you? No one likes to be told that they are a sinner. That is why sometimes it’s hard to even find someone that can spell the word anymore. But when God’s power is there and God’s messenger is denouncing sin and also announcing a Savior, God’s power can do things that the human mind would not expect. Not only did John knock down those hills of pride and point out the sins of the people. He called them whitewash tombs, he called them all kinds of things that just laid bare the fact that they were sinners, but he didn’t stop there. He didn’t say, “Now go home and get away from me you filthy bunch of sinners.” Instead we are told he announced a Savior. He preached repentance and a baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

He said, “The problem is sin, but here is the answer—baptism for the forgiveness of your sins.” Even John’s baptism, Scripture tells us, was for the forgiveness of sins. It wouldn’t be like the Savior coming after him, the One that he pointed to, in that Jesus

himself sends out the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit was there and acting. Not because of John, but because God said that the Spirit would be working in this baptism because it would be for the forgiveness of sins.

That same Savior comes to us today as we have a baptism. He washes away the sins of a small child, a child that is born in sin. It's an incredible thing. It's a wonderful thing. It's this confidence that salvation depends on the Savior and not on us, not on our decisions, not on our efforts, because our efforts and our decisions are always going to be tainted with sin. But God works in pure Gospel that Christ lived in our place and died in our place and he put that power in water and word. He put that power in the Word of God. He put that power in wine and wafer together with the Word. He tells us, "Here is what makes you holy. Here is what gives you the holiness side to man—not your efforts, but my Son's life and death." That's why John would say that he wasn't worthy to untie Jesus' sandals, because Jesus was God's son, because Jesus was the Savior. He was the One that would do all the things that John was proclaiming. It would be like saying the sportscaster is the one who wins the game for the sports team. It wouldn't make sense. So John says, "Don't look at me. Look at him." And he points people to Jesus.

We can do the same thing every day. We can point ourselves and each other to Jesus when we are troubled by our sins, when we are troubled with guilt and when we recognize pride for what it is. We can point each other to Christ where our sins are completely and absolutely taken away. That is how prepare.

We prepare to celebrate Christ's birth. We prepare for his second coming which, as Peter told us, can come at any time—through repentance—which means being sorry for that sin, turning away from that sin, and turning to Jesus—and, in Jesus, finding forgiveness, joy, peace and eternal life.

To make sure that we notice that God gave us his look and raised his voice through the life and ministry of John the Baptist, God gives us that same look today as our fellow Christians encourage us to hear God's Word, to rejoice in God's Word and to make faithful use of his Sacraments. As we do so, we will find the comfort of knowing that even though we are sinners, Jesus Christ has taken away our sins and eternal life is ours.