
"A Prophet Prepares Us"

Sermon Text: Isaiah 11:1-10 / Matthew 3:1-3
Mariner Sands Chapel

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This is the second week of the season we call Advent. While it seems that the focus is on Christmas, there is more to look forward to; namely the next return of Jesus to Earth. Advent is all about the future. It makes us focus our hope on a new heaven and a new earth as a gift from God. For that future, we are to wait in hope. Advent is tied to Christmas because in Jesus we get a glimpse of what God has for us in the future.

Read the two passages cited in today's scripture lesson; Isaiah and Matthew. In each passage, we are given a proclamation of Jesus's coming. In Isaiah (Hebrew name meaning "God is Salvation"), Jesus is characterized by a metaphor of tender shoot, springing from the stump, that will grow into a new continuation of the kingdom of God. The previous kingdom of Judah, established by King David, will be much bigger and last longer than any other kingdom on Earth. When the Messiah King Jesus comes, the Spirit of God will rest (or remain permanently) on Him. All human government will rest on His shoulders. He will establish a lasting peace on earth. He will remove the curse of sin. All nature and even the wild animal kingdom will be restored to its original design. Isaiah sees the future when the wolf will lie down in peace with the lamb. He sees the future paradise yet to come.

As Matthew describes in this brief section, God will send someone like an Elijah, to announce the coming of the King Jesus. This prophet, John the Baptizer, will arrive like a "rock star" on the scene, drawing large crowds in remote areas of the Judean wilderness. His early message is loud, simple, and abrupt. "Get ready," he says. Repent. To repent is an imperative to turn around. Imagine a military drill sergeant crying out, "About face!" or, "To the rear, March!" It is more than just turning from your walk away from God; it is a command to make a moral return to following God. The crowd response is overwhelming. He's going viral and all those who repent are also getting soaked with water in this new concept called, baptism.

For more than 400 years, Israel had not heard any special messages from God. It could be compared to a cable news channel whose broadcast whose broadcast was stuck on mute for so long, that the control booth put up a slide saying, "Please Stand By." There were no prophets sent after Malachi. Suddenly John appears on the landscape, calling people out, a fresh bold witness that this thing which has been prophesied is happening now. It's happening! People are crying, hearts are restored, the flash mob is gathering in the desert and everyone is walking home wet. It is the prelude to a revival of faith and the fulfillment of a promise.

Comparing the message of Isaiah and John the Baptist is like going to a movie theater at a premier showing. Before the movie, the lights dim and you are prepared for coming attractions. Isaiah's message is the coming attraction. It will be coming soon. Then as the movie begins, we have a musical prelude to prepare the audience for the opening scene. John's message sets the mood for the opening scene. It is the last preparation. The Old Testament, written hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, contains over 300 prophecies Jesus fulfilled through his life, death, and resurrection. Mathematically speaking, the odds of anyone fulfilling just 8 prophecies is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. In magnificent detail, only a God who loves us could foreknow and accomplish all that was written about the Christ. Do you think you could trust a God who has told you over 300 times that He will fix the curse of sin, send you a Savior, and give you eternal life?