

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

DECEMBER 10, 2023



MESSENGER

and path straightener

by Drew Downs

The mission of John the Baptizer:
“Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight”.

The one going on ahead of the Messiah is there to set things up for him. Make things easier.

The implication is, of course, that the paths are not straight; they must be curvy. Maybe hilly or even treacherous. John; that guy is

out there landscaping, terraforming, making a way where there is no way. So the Messiah can just show up.

What the messenger does, however, is offer the people a message. Repent. Turn. Confess. And become new. In baptism.

John also proclaims that he’s only the opening act. And the main event will be even more spectacular.

ADVENT

2023

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Loving Advent

If you've been around a liturgical church awhile, you know that Advent is the season which precedes Christmas. And that the Christmas Season begins on Christmas Day and continues through twelfth night, the eve of the Epiphany.

For many, reclaiming the beauty, hope, and devotion found in Advent is deeply countercultural. While everyone is singing Christmas carols, we're preparing for the coming of Christ.

Someone recently pointed out that our personal boycotts do nothing. And perceived negativity wins no converts. In fact, other than "tradition," what is the *positive, hopeful, or effective* vision we offer people to actually embrace the Advent season?

I was struck by how this question nailed my experience—of both pitting Advent *against* Christmas and acting like my own protestations sound to others like anything but "bah, humbug!"

So what is beautiful about Advent? I think it begins with understanding that it isn't about preparing for Christmas, but the *advent of the dream of God*. We prepare for the light that is breaking into the world. To change everything.

Accepting that people are eager for Christmas joy, our inviting one another to prepare for miracles and realizing hopes for the world: that's a captivating ask. Join us in making that joy permanent. That's what we're up to.

With love,
Drew

ADVENT

2023

FOR SUNDAY

Advent 2B

December 10, 2023

Collect

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

ADVENT

Reflection

The evangelist who wrote the gospel we call Mark begins with the ultimate faith statement. They start, right out of the gate, by declaring precisely what is to follow.

We are at the beginning.
This is the Good News
of Jesus, Messiah,
Son of God.

This language is all so familiar to us. But it is loaded. Political. Powerful. The evangelist isn't mincing words. He isn't waiting for us to see. Nor are they making us discover for ourselves. This is the journey we're starting out on, together. To experience the good news of the Messiah. A man and Son of God.

Of course we know this already. It isn't shocking to followers of Jesus two thousand years later. How could it? But it is an electric opening for a story that will immediately thrust us into the action. We'll meet John the Baptizer shortly before he will be baptizing Jesus.

The potency of this language is countered by, not just our familiarity, but our expectation that it would be. That evangelists would pump up the juice to convince us to care. And because we already know these things about Jesus, well, it comes off as obvious and conviction, rather than poignant and defiant.

As we continue in this new, familiar season of Advent, we're invited into a different kind of approach. Not one of forgetting what we know. Or merely re-experiencing it, but to ponder the message of a Messiah that has come into the world. One that continues to participate in the world. And through him, we all might be saved.

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
215 N. 7TH ST TERRE HAUTE IN 47807
812.232.5165

STSTEPHENSTH.ORG
