

Sermon for December 5, 2025 – Advent 2

Matthew 3:1-12 EHV

Theme: **The kingdom of heaven is near!**

- 1) Receive Christ in genuine repentance.
- 2) Let His reign in your heart show in your life.

In those days, John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, ²“Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near!” ³Yes, this is he of whom this was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.” ⁴John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem, all of Judea, and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him. ⁶They were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. ⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, “You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Therefore produce fruit in keeping with repentance! ⁹Do not think of saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. ¹⁰Already the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹I baptize you with water for repentance. But the one who comes after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Is your heart ruled by Jesus? I wish my heart always accepted His reign, but I often fail. Instead of being content with God’s blessings, I covet the things I see in holiday advertisements. Rather than finding peace in the future Jesus promises, I allow the stresses of life to cause me anxiety and doubt. My thoughts frequently reveal another lord’s attempt to rule my heart. Do you feel this tension also?

It’s vital, then, to pay attention to John the Baptist’s preaching! How come? To prepare for Christ’s reign, because our hearts will never find true peace until Jesus rules over them. Let us consider these things under the theme: **The kingdom of heaven is near!** 1) Receive Christ in genuine repentance. 2) Let His reign in your heart show in your life.

Part One: Receive Christ in genuine repentance.

Our sermon text takes place about 29 years after Jesus’ birth. Yes, the Christ had already come,

but God kept His identity concealed from the public until they could be prepared to receive Him.

In those days, John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, ²“Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near!” ³Yes, this is he of whom this was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.”

John the Baptist was the promised forerunner of the Messiah. His ministry prepared God’s people for Christ’s revelation. The phrase “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near!” summarized his message.

John preached simple words, but their meaning is profound. The “kingdom” John proclaimed is more than just the “heaven” Jesus will bring with him on the Last Day. No, it is Christ’s ongoing reign in the hearts of His believers. The Holy Spirit uses God’s Law to expose our sins to get us to repent. He then uses the Gospel to establish Christ’s throne in our hearts by awakening us to faith and cleansing us from all sin. Jesus uses His Word to direct our lives to accomplish His will for our good and His glory. Understand, then, that *it is God who is working in you, both to will and to work, for the sake of his good pleasure.*ⁱ

By declaring that the kingdom of heaven was near, John signalled that the promised Saviour had come. How did God want His people to receive Him? By repenting of their sins.

What does it mean “to repent”? More than you might think. The word in our text translated as “repent” literally means “to have a changed mind.” Imagine a person who once loved sin and hated God now doing the opposite: loving God and hating sin. That is repentance!

But what could bring about such a 180-degree change in a person’s heart? Only the Holy Spirit working through God’s law and Gospel!

Repentance, therefore, has two parts: The first is that we recognize our sins and remorsefully confess them to God, acknowledging that we deserve His just punishment because of them. The second part is that we trust God forgives all our sins for Jesus’ sake and reconciles us to Himself. This will move us to want to thank God by no longer living for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again for us. We call such living the fruit (the natural result) of repentance.

Our sermon text continues: *⁴John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.*

John’s entire way of life was a testimony against worrying about worldly things. It stood in direct contrast with the Pharisees and Sadducees (the Jewish religious leaders of his day). Like the prosperity preachers of today, they pursued worldly wealth, comfort, and fame – imagining them

to be signs of God's blessing. Aren't we tempted to do the same? We spend a lot of time pursuing and worrying about worldly things instead of focusing our attention on the one thing we really need.

But John did not concern himself with worldly worries or pursuits. Confident in his calling, he left home to live in a place where there was little food or water. He possessed nothing except God's promise to provide, which is precisely what God did! John's life illustrated the truth that *man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*"ⁱⁱⁱ

Our text continues: ⁵*Then Jerusalem, all of Judea, and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him.* ⁶*They were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.*

Repentance involves heeding God's gracious invitation to turn away from selfish, worldly pursuits to find true life in Christ. The people who put their earthly lives on pause to hear John preach illustrated this truth. And what did the Holy Spirit lead them to find in the Gospel John proclaimed? True forgiveness, peace, and hope.

As the Holy Spirit moved the crowds in John's day, so He moved you to leave all worldly busyness behind to come to Church. Here you hear God's call to repent and rejoice in Christ's reign. The baptismal font reminds you of how God adopted you as His dear child by forgiving your sins, awakening faith in your heart, and sealing you with the Holy Spirit. In the Lord's Supper, you commune with the living Christ – receiving the very body and blood He used to secure your salvation. The kingdom of Christ is not only near; it is here – received through God's Word and Sacraments.

How then should you approach Sunday worship? With a self-assured or complacent attitude? No, but with a repentant one, as illustrated by what happened next in our sermon text.

Part Two: Let His reign in your heart show in your life.

⁷*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"* ⁸*Therefore produce fruit in keeping with repentance!* ⁹*Do not think of saying to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones.*

The Holy Spirit gave John special insight into the hearts of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They put on a good show by coming to John. But here's the problem: relying on their heritage, they didn't feel they needed to repent of anything. They viewed baptism as nothing more than a way to flaunt their piety and promote themselves among the people.

Oh, how I wish I could say I were not like them, but, sadly, we all have a little Pharisee or Sadducee inside of us. Our sinful nature tempts us into thinking we are good people with no need for a deep-digging examination of our very soul in the light of God's Law. Why? For some, the devil uses our Christian upbringing as an excuse. For others, it's the thought that they do more good than bad. Whenever we act on such thoughts, we become like the Pharisees and Sadducees before John:

coming to worship to show off our religiosity instead of listening to the LORD's Word in repentant faith. May the Holy Spirit, therefore, lead us to take John's admonition to heart: *produce fruit in keeping with repentance!*

¹⁰Already the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹I baptize you with water for repentance. But the one who comes after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The Almighty Lord didn't come to save the self-righteous, who think they have little of which to repent. He didn't die on the cross so that you could continue making yourself the primary focus of your life. No, he came as your Saviour to rescue you from all the evil, earthly things that entrap your heart. He came to save you from your deep-seated sinfulness, because of which God's wrath looms over you. He came to reconcile you to Himself so you can live as His child forever with Him in heaven.

Therefore, He invites you to repent: to be changed by His grace. The LORD uses His law to show you your sins – threatening everlasting judgment upon all who refuse His call to repent. But He doesn't stop there. Out of great love for you, He reveals His Gospel: the good news of how Jesus fully paid for your sins and reconciled you to God.

Through these means, the Holy Spirit works a change in your heart. No longer do you live in fear of God's wrath but in the confidence of His love. He awakens a new desire in you: one that hates your previous selfishness and desires to live for Him. The fruits of the Holy Spirit's work in your heart begin to show in your life, often without your realizing it: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.ⁱⁱⁱ

Oh, what joy there is in life when Christ reigns in your heart! Contentment and peace fill you as you joyfully look forward to Jesus' reappearing.^{iv} With Christ reigning in your heart, your life takes on new purpose and meaning as you love and forgive others just as Jesus loves and forgives you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do you want to find true peace and contentment, not only this holiday season but every moment of your life? Then take to heart the promise God made through John the Baptist: **The kingdom of heaven is near!** Receive Christ in genuine repentance. Let His reign in your heart show in your life. Amen.

ⁱ Philippians 2:13 EHV

ⁱⁱ Deuteronomy 8:3 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Galatians 5:22

^{iv} Cf. Philippians 4:4-7, 12-13