



Second Sunday of Advent
7 December 2025

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Winter has arrived. It is early enough in the season that the snow is still welcome and beautiful even if the crowd in worship last Sunday was lighter than we might expect on the first Sunday of Advent. But along with the arrival of winter comes the arrival of extra house guests. At our house, almost without fail on a yearly basis, we seem to adopt a resident mouse around this time of year. I know it is not the same mouse because well – every year the mouse who shows up at our house moves on to a “farm” up North sometime during the season. However, the lines of communication are strong in the mouse community, and a new mouse shows up every year. Last Wednesday was no exception – I went into the garage turned on the light and a rather chunky mouse waddled from under the refrigerator towards the safety of the snow blower. I yelled and no one came running. But after going back into the kitchen and announcing the arrival of our newest house guest – my wife suggested I let the dog out to catch the mouse. But knowing Baxter, who rushes for nothing, I did not have high hopes. So, when I went out to the garage again – my wife followed me and opened the door and sent the dog out to catch the mouse. She closed the door – Baxter looked at me, wondering why he had been unceremoniously kicked off of the warmth of the living room rug – when all of a sudden, the leaf blower fell off of the workbench, and the dog, in complete shock, went running out of the garage faster than I have ever seen him run. And the mouse – reappeared and made his way back under the safety of the refrigerator – waddling in safety and contentment unphased by my yelling or the threatening presence of the dog.

When John the Baptist appears at the River Jordan, calling people to repent, promising to prepare the way of the Lord, there are two reactions. One of disgust, from the religious elite, who are offended when John calls them snakes. And from the people who are hungry for word of new life from God - there is anticipation – there is expectation – there is hope. After 400 years of silence from God, the prophet John the Baptist appears at the Jordan. The last prophet who spoke a word from God was the prophet Malachi at the end of the Old Testament. He offered a warning to the people of God after they had returned from more than 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Malachi arrives during the time of Nehemiah, the Jewish official responsible for the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. And through the prophet Malachi – God speaks these words, “⁵“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.” A foreshadow of the great day when God’s anointed one – the Christ – will come. It is God’s last Word for four hundred years. And then John walks into the waters of the Jordan. Repent. Prepare.

We do not get to the star and the shepherds and the manger until we meet up with John the Baptist. He is the last person in the world most of us want to see. John is the guy you pass on the street reminding yourself to keep your head down – “don’t make eye contact, don’t make eye contact.” Until we do. Yet for all the shouting of “repent,” the shock of camel’s hair clothing and a diet of locusts and honey, people were drawn to the river’s edge to hear what John had to say. It had been far too long since God’s Word had been revealed through a prophet. God’s people remembered stories told to them – from great-grandparent to grandparent, for grandparent to parent, from parent to child. The stories were told of prophets who proclaimed the Word of God. Passed down from generation to generation.

- **Miriam:** who prophesied that her mother would give birth to a son, who would deliver Israel from slavery.
- **Moses:** who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.
- **Isaiah:** who ministered to the Kingdom of Judah before their exile, offering messages of both judgment and a powerful vision of a suffering servant.
- **Deborah:** who led God’s people to freedom, in victory over the Canaanites, after 20 years of oppression.
- **Jeremiah:** who warned the people of Jerusalem about the coming disaster due to their sins and also spoke of hope for future redemption.
- **Ezekiel:** who ministered to the exiles in Babylon and gave prophecies about the destruction of the Temple, as well as the future restoration of Israel.



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But this prophet was different. John called for repentance, telling all who would listen that the “kingdom of God had come near.” He told the people that it was time to “prepare the way of the Lord.” And then with great humility, John shared his own story of faith, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.” What is different about John, is that this prophet speaks about the promised holy One of God who would arrive after John. Never had a prophet spoken with such assurance that God’s Holy One would come so quickly. Prophets often spoke of a future far beyond what they or anyone might see in their lifetime. But John – speaks of the One who will come after him. And John succeeded in building up in God’s people what was promised all along – anticipation – expectation – hope.

Advent is a season of waiting and preparing, so it makes sense that we light a candle of hope to ground all that will follow. Advent starts by asking us to acknowledge something we know to be true: We certainly do not live in the best of all possible worlds, and we long for God to heal the problems, injustices, and griefs we cannot fix on our own. And so, we light a candle for hope. During Advent we admit that the world could be better. We expect that God has better things in mind for us, for our neighbors, for those who are neglected, for future generations, and for our planet. We pray for change, and in so doing, we are invited to light a candle for peace. There is a hint of protest in our Advent practices and prayers. In Advent, we hear readings and sing songs that speak of the promised Savior to come. And while we wait, it may look like everything is falling part and the world is straining under the weight of its own chaos, but in such times, we hear God’s invitation for the church to preach – to live out the good news in places that look hopeless.

Author Matthew Skinner writes, “I sometimes wonder in Advent: Are we still here? Are we still gathering around tiny flames on Advent wreaths as if they are beacons that can illuminate a new way forward? We still live as though gun violence in schools is a cost we’re willing to absorb. We still react to poverty and massive wealth inequality with indifference. Hope is a mistake, if all our hope leads us to do today is stay huddled together or run away into the desert. Advent instead involves a different type of hope, one that has an active, restless character. Those candles on the wreaths do more than provide stubborn resistance against encroaching shadows. Flames in the Bible symbolize purification and wholeness. Even more, the candle’s flame symbolizes God’s presence – tiny fires that contain more power than they appear to, for they become to each of us a lighthouse of active hope,” for each of us to see for ourselves – for each of us to inspire another with hope, and this day, peace.

The problem with hearing the prophet John shout at us today is that his words do anything but offer peace. Repent. Prepare. Neither of his commands engender peace. In our Advent book study, we are balancing the tension of what was, what is, and what will be. Essentially, that Jesus has come, is present here and now, and will come again. And in that tension, as we are called to repent and prepare, anticipate and expect – there is the presence of a prophet who does not speak for himself, but for God. And if God sees fit to send a prophet into the world to bring us hope, then my friends, I am confident in God’s promise of peace. However elusive it might be in this world – in our lives – in this moment or another. It is possible that my uninvited house guest has more to teach me than I previously thought.

Baxter might have run for the hills at the sound of the leaf blower falling to the ground, but the mouse, waited long enough for the dust to settle and then, quietly and confidently, waddled on his way back to the safety and warmth of his home underneath our refrigerator. Perhaps this is the promise to carry with you in these Advent days. Just as the world seems to be crashing down around us and an abrasive prophet is yelling at you from the cold water of a river you have yet to step into, maybe the reminder is to remember where we have come from and where we are going. From the peace of God, we have come – and by God’s grace, we will enter into God’s peace again. As only God has promised. In Advent we remember promises God has made, and we look forward to seeing God make good on them and fulfill them. “Peace, I leave with you;” says the Holy One of God, “my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Maranatha. Come Lord Jesus. Amen.