

## Preparing Room for Christ

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St. David's Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA  
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The Third Sunday of Advent, Year C  
*Luke 3:7-18*

*"John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance."- Luke 3:7*

Here we are, on the Third Sunday of Advent, just ten days away from Christmas Day. The Season of Advent is by far my favorite of the liturgical calendar. I love everything about it!

I enjoy creating and using the Advent wreath, the beautiful blue vestments we wear at St. David's, the greens placed around our worship spaces, and even the collects, readings, and hymns—all of which are some of my favorites during this season.

I also really enjoy the things we do at home during this time. The day after Thanksgiving, my wife Marissa and I put up our Christmas trees—yes, I said trees; we have more than one in the house! They're artificial, of course, since we have two dogs and a crawling baby. I also set up a Christmas village that was my mom's. It has everything, down to the fake snow on the ground.

We hang some lights, and of course, hang our stockings. Then, we bake Christmas cookies for the multiple cookie swaps I signed up for—someone remind me not to do that next year!

What I enjoy most about Advent, though, is the feeling it gives me. It's the feeling of coming home—a feeling of love. All these things we do as a family are things I did growing up. Some of my fondest childhood memories were made during Advent. I remember Christmas Pageant rehearsals, the prayers we said around the Advent wreath, decorating the tree, and setting up the snow village. Advent, to me, radiates love and comfort. Every year, when it arrives, it feels like part of me is reconnecting with my family, my childhood, and that deep sense of coming home.

Part of the Season of Advent is about journeying home to Bethlehem—it's about returning home to God. Advent is a journey of the heart, one that brings us closer to the God who took the form of a baby lying in a manger. I don't think I'm going out on a limb when I say that most of us think we know how to prepare for the Season of Advent. We associate it with the Advent wreaths, decorations, gift-buying, and wrapping. That's true, of course—these are all part of my preparation during this season.

However, this morning in our Gospel passage from Luke, we hear a message from John the Baptist that doesn't exactly radiate love and comfort. We pick up right where we left off from last week. This wild man in the wilderness, John the Baptist, was preaching a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins as a way to prepare the way for

Jesus to begin his ministry on earth. His message wasn't about Advent wreaths or decorations; his preparation for the crowds surrounding him was to call them to repentance. In fact, he began by calling them a "brood of vipers"! He told them to "bear fruit worthy of repentance." John warned them not to rest on their comfort of knowing that Abraham was their ancestor.

John believed that to prepare for Jesus and create a home within their hearts for God to dwell, the crowds—and even us today—need to repent. The crowds naturally responded, "What then should we do?" John answered them by suggesting they be charitable—those who had extra clothing or food should share with those who had none. He told the tax collectors to be honest, only collecting the amount prescribed. He told the soldiers to be honest and satisfied with their wages.

John was telling these crowds that to create a home for God to dwell in their hearts and to feel God's love, we must look beyond ourselves. For John, repentance means radically living out the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself. Repentance requires self-examination; it starts with the individual. John's focus is on ethical reform, not revolution. The first step toward building a redeemed community is for those who have abundance to share with those in need.

While we eagerly prepare for the joy of Christ's birth, John calls us to a deeper, more difficult preparation: a transformation within our own hearts. He doesn't simply call for outward rituals; he challenges us to confront what is inside us—the selfishness, sin, and greed—that prevent us from welcoming Christ fully into our lives.

It's not exactly a warm and fuzzy message on this Third Sunday of Advent to look within ourselves and repent. But it's one we all need to hear. Our selfishness, sin, and greed can weigh us down. So, in addition to our typical traditions that help us prepare for the birth of Jesus, we must also examine ourselves and discern how God might be calling us to love our neighbor.

Ultimately, the message of loving one's neighbor is good news. It's good news because if we take the time for self-examination, as John the Baptist suggests, we will model the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. We will live out the Gospel together. When we look beyond ourselves and help those in need, we create space for God to dwell in the hearts of those around us, and we are ready for the birth of the Christ child on Christmas Day.

At the beginning of this Advent season, St. David's held its annual Starlight Service of Remembering. We gathered for prayers, words of hope in Scripture, silent meditation, and music reflective of the season. This service was especially important for those grieving during this time. People were able to honor their loved ones by writing their names and a brief message on a star that was then hung on a Christmas tree. Those stars reminded us that the light of those who have died continues to shine in our lives.

The Starlight Service is one of my favorites. It shows that St. David's is intentional about providing space for people who are grieving to find comfort during Advent. It's an

example of how our church helps others allow God to dwell within them. Because even though we grieve, God is still walking alongside us.

I also appreciate how St. David's looks beyond itself with outreach initiatives during Advent, such as the Angel Tree, Red Gift Card Envelopes, World Gifts, and the Mitten Tree. All these outreach projects help those who have less. I'm always overwhelmed by how generous this community is with these projects. You all go above and beyond to make these initiatives a massive success. After the service, be sure to check the trees in the Narthex (or Vestry room at 8 am)—there's always an opportunity to give.

Just as John the Baptist urged the crowds to look beyond themselves, we at St. David's are called to do the same: reaching out to those who are suffering or in need. The Starlight Service, the Angel Tree, the Mitten Tree, and the other outreach initiatives reflect this spirit of repentance in action. These acts of charity help us prepare room in our hearts for Christ and invite others into the warmth of God's love.

As we continue our journey through Advent, let us remember that it's not just about decorations or gifts, but about preparing our hearts to receive Christ. John the Baptist challenges us to look beyond the surface and engage in transformative repentance—one that leads us to love our neighbors and share what we have with those in need. This season calls for self-examination, a turning away from selfishness, and a turning toward selfless acts of love. Doing so allows God to dwell within and among us, creating a community that reflects the Kingdom of Heaven.

This Advent, as we reflect on John's words and our acts of charity, we are invited to embrace the deep, life-changing love that comes from putting others before ourselves. Let our generosity and our care for others be a tangible sign of Christ's presence in our lives.

May our hearts be truly prepared to welcome Jesus on Christmas Day.