

# NEW BEGINNINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Second Sunday in Advent – December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024 (11:11 am)

## PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

Psalm 66:1-12  
Malachi 3:1-7b  
Philippians 1:2-11  
**Luke 3:1-14**

### **The Preaching of Repentance Prepares Us for the Coming of the Lord**

The preaching and Baptism “of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3) prepare us for the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. The historic work of John the Baptist was completed with the first advent of our Lord Jesus in the flesh, but the ministry of the forerunner continues in the preaching of Law and Gospel and in Holy Baptism. Through His messengers, the Lord calls people of all nations to “see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6). Our haughtiness is removed and our mountains of pride are brought low, but the Lord humbles us in order to exalt us in His mercy. As the Lord has begun this good work of repentance in us, so also does He perfect it by His Word and Holy Spirit, and He “will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). He purifies us to be His priestly people, precious in His sight and abounding in faith and love, so that we offer our very lives in righteousness to the Lord (Mal. 3:3-4).

***‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.***

***Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’***

*(Luke 3:4-6)*

We can often see life in a boring way. For many, day turns to night and then today again with no real joy, no emotion, no bliss. Existence is boring, the same things repeating in a loop... and not all of them good. Boring.

Unfortunately, things are not that simple. The exact opposite is true. Yes, THERE ARE boring and “blah” moments in our lives – these may even make up the majority of our lives – but what defines us are those moments that are anything but boring. The SHOCKS! And they happen to all of us. They can come on a global or on a personal scale. The common and simple news does not call our attention, but the shocks and sensationalism call our attention because it breaks our routine and makes life less boring but can also bring despair.

Other shocks are not so cosmic, but they are still big. The death of a family member or an unexpected illness shocks us and turns our lives around in many cases. Shocks come to us all. And they change us. Sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. In many cases, the direction of change is in our own hands.

For our comfort, let me remind you that the story of Jesus, which we begin this Second Sunday again in Advent, is an excellent context to deal with shocks. See, the whole Gospel is one shock after another. Think about it. God in human flesh. Shock. Son of a single teenage mother. Shock. From Nazareth (which even the apostles felt was a city without importance: *"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46)*). Shock. King of kings and Lord of lords. *A golden cradle for the newborn?* No, a manger full of forage. Shock. One shock after another.

And the shocks would continue. As Jesus ministered in the field, he taught such things as "Blessed" or "Happy" or "Congratulations to ... those who weep, for they will be comforted." Huh? "Congratulations to ... the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Come on. "Congratulations...when you are persecuted for the sake of justice..." (*Matthew 5:4, 5, 10*). You must be kidding! There was the teaching that said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant." (*Matthew 23:11*) Of course! Then there was that strange saying that "the last will be the first..." (*Matthew 20:16*). Not what we would expect. Shock.

Finally, the incredible shock to those who loved him was the torture and murder of Jesus in the way of the cross. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, restored limbs to the lame, and even brought the dead back to life. The hopes and dreams of his followers convinced them that this was the Messiah of God - the Anointed, the one who would lead them into a glorious future. But now, those hopes and dreams were dust and ash. *Is it over... or was it?* We know better. One more shock was needed. Resurrection.

**Do you see?** I told you: the story of Jesus is one shock after another. A comforting thought when I realize that the times I need Jesus most are when I'm in one of my shocks. They will NOT bigger than He can handle.

As I said before, the shocks of life don't necessarily push us in one direction or another.

There is more to this text than the comfort of knowing that our Lord does not mind any shock. There is John's call to repent...a challenge to change the things in our lives that need to be changed... and the promise of God's forgiveness put into effect by the cleansing waters of his Baptism.

Then there are those lofty words of Isaiah: ***"Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight ways for him. Every valley will be filled, every mountain and hill will be lowered.***

***The crooked roads will become straight, the rough paths smooth.***” The image is taken from the massive engineering efforts of ancient Babylon. Make straight new roads, not those old roads that are content in following the terrain. It's the difference between riding here on the flat Highways in Saskatchewan and riding the winding mountain roads in British Columbia. For the ancients, this was a theological statement - **nothing should prevent or delay the coming of God.**

What a message for us from Advent! PREPARE OUR HEARTS. PREPARE HIM ROOM. PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD. Perhaps we would be right to say that all hearts go out to excavators and backhoes, rock crushers and road levelers:

***\* There are mountains that need to be brought down - mountains of racism, sexism, ageism and any other “-ism” that blocks our path to healthy relationships with each other and with our Lord.***

***\* There are valleys to be filled - valleys of depression, despair, loneliness, sadness, pain, any of which can take us away from the rich relationship the Savior offers, and which prevents us from enjoying the fellowship of faith.***

***\* There are crooked places to be straightened out - yes, there are perversities, even among those we could never imagine, thin exteriors mask interiors rotten with abuse, neglect, immorality and even violence.***

***\* There are difficult places that must be smoothed over - difficult places that have arisen because of oppression and injustice.***

There is work to be done! Bring the heavy equipment! And we seek for help from the Holy Spirit, who helps us perfectly to prepare the way of the Lord to see Salvation prepared since before time!

As our text says, ***“and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*** Imagine that. This mass of humanity that suffers through those periods of silent despair interspersed with the inevitable shocks stretches along the slopes overlooking this wonderful wide road. As far as the eye can see, they are spread out. Men and women, boys and girls. Rich and poor, young and old, slaves and free. Every nation, language and tribe. Red and yellow, black and white. All are eagerly gathered to watch the coming of the King of all kings, who is the personification of God's salvation, God's healing, God's integrity, God's shalom.

***Can you see or imagine it?*** Yes, I know my eyesight is impaired. The mountains are so high and the valleys so low, the crooked places are still horribly curved, and the rugged areas resist any attempt to smooth them out. And yes, there is one shock after another. Look beyond all of this. Look to God's salvation - Jesus. See Jesus in the pages of Scripture

... see Jesus in the lives of your fellow worshipers ... see Jesus in the faces of those whose needs we seek to meet ... see Jesus' present as we gather at his table. The image becomes increasingly clear when the Word of Jesus is at work in our hearts. This is a promise from above. "**and all flesh** (*even you and me*) **shall see the salvation of God**" - Jesus. It was the best shock of all that happened at the first coming and will be in the second coming of Jesus. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.