

Sunday December 7, 2025

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
 ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
 make his paths straight.’”

Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Sermon:

Three key terms are presented to us in this passage: **Repentance, Baptism and Salvation.**

All three of these mentioned need our full understanding. At times, we get so involved with personal achievements that we neglect the word of God. What we need to do is to ask ourselves “What are some things that we can focus on to make it to heaven? We try to figure out what our top priorities should be in life; some of us do so more often than others. However, we should all try to be faithful witnesses to God’s presence in the world. John the Baptist came before Jesus. People from all over Jerusalem and Judea went to the wilderness to hear John speak, and it became a place of revelation where people confessed their sins. John’s ministry built the framework for Jesus’ mission. In verse 2, John says “Repent, for

the kingdom of heaven is near". Don't be left out! Jesus will use the same words when He starts His own ministry.

By just reading this passage, one can feel the conviction in his bold preaching and the urgency in getting baptized but why did people need to be baptized or get baptized their children baptized? We do so because we need to turn in a new direction! Just like people back then needed to live a lifestyle that reflected the image of Christ, we too need to prepare our hearts for the kingdom of heaven. Baptism isn't about getting a baby dressed in white and taking pretty pictures for Facebook. According to our Book of Common Prayer, Baptism is a symbol of God's grace and a divine act of adoption. In other words, God adopts us as His children through Baptism. Baptism is a sacrament rather than simply a human desire to follow Christ. It enables us to walk with God, receive His forgiveness, and follow His commandments. Through Baptism, we become members of Jesus Christ's body. Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with Christ, involving a commitment to dedicate our lives to God.

As parents, we bring our children to the baptismal font because we recognize that baptism is the beginning of our spiritual journey and also because we want to honor God with the innocent lives He has entrusted us with. I remember after having my son, I couldn't wait to start bringing him to church with me. As soon as he got his first vaccines, we were in business. By the time he was 6 months old, he was baptized, and everyone at our church knew who he was. However, when I first discussed it with my husband, he thought that I was just looking for a reason to throw a big party; a reason to get new clothes, order a cake or just show off my new baby to everyone. After continuously bringing that up, he realized that I genuinely wanted to have our son baptized to thank God for this marvelous little gift. My son's baptism ensured me that he was officially a member of the church and was protected by God. Besides, out of everything that we

have, our children are the most precious things, and they are also the only things that we can take to heaven with us. So, why not help them build their own faith in God? If we do, they will definitely join us in that heavenly feast that has been promised to us.

John the Baptist preached repentance and at the Jordan River, he baptized people in response to that message. John baptized with water for repentance but he said that the one who will come after him (Jesus) will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire represents cleansing, spiritual purification, transformation.

Now let's look at Verses 9 and 10: Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Religious leaders were Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees saw themselves as righteous because they were biological descendants of Abraham. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. John the Baptist was warning both groups not to put their hope in their spiritual ancestry but to come to God. Likewise, these verses explain to us that one thing we cannot do is simply rely on other people's prayers and righteousness. Even from those of us who come from a family of dedicated Christians or in my case a lineage of ordained priests, God doesn't issue group passes to heaven. On judgment day, we cannot tell God, "remember me? My grandma went to church every Sunday, she was also a vestry member at St Tim's in Herndon, Virginia". And God saying, "oh yeah, let her in, let him in! Negative! Personal commitment to Christ is essential for salvation! However, one important thing to remember is that Anglican theology emphasizes the collective nature of our faith journey. It highlights the need for community and mutual support. That's why when a baptism is happening, the

Minister asks, “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?” And people reply, “We will!” (BCP, 303). So, we journey together as Christians. We make a collective effort towards Salvation encouraging each other to stay on the right path.

Going back to the image of the axe lying at the root of the trees shows that judgment is imminent! The Pharisees and the Sadducees were shocked thinking that they were already blessed through their heritage and they assumed that it was enough! There are times when I’ve heard people say something like “I’m not religious but my parents are, my whole family is! So, I’m good!” But the Bible tells us otherwise and that’s why we need to bear fruits and work on our spirituality not only on Sundays but every single day. Faith entails lived practice meaning repentance is not a one-time thing but an ongoing process.

John then shifts metaphors from baptism to the threshing floor to explain once again that judgment and salvation are real and not to be forgotten. In verse 12, John says “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” This means that God will assess each person’s personal walk with Him.

God will come back for his bride referring to us, the church. Not everyone who has ever lived but those who obeyed his commandments. Those who represented holiness, justice, fairness, and compassion. So, salvation ought to be what we strive for as Christians! We need to make sure that we are right with God. Romans 8:14 tells us “For all who are led by the spirit of God are children of God” Spirit-filled Christians get to witness God and walk in His way. So, don’t look up to other people and be

disappointed! But draw your strength from the Lord! Look for Christ, the author of Salvation! God requires a change of heart, and you'll know this change is happening because you start to worry about sin. The closer you get to Christ, the more you cannot stand living in sin. A change of heart comes with a change of mentality and therefore a change of lifestyle.

Conclusion: My brothers and sisters in Christ, as we are getting ready to start a new year soon, let us cautiously consider our own relationship with Christ. Please ask yourselves "Am I ready for the return of Christ?" Just in case you're in doubt or in a tough season. Today, I invite you to commit your way to the Lord and trust Him. Now is the time to repent, let go of our bad habits, our sinful ways and come to our loving God! Let us choose to hear John the Baptist's message and work toward spending eternity with Christ. Let us do what God is calling us to do. Let us come to Christ and lean on His everlasting arms! Amen!