

Sermon Luke 1 5 25 1st Sunday in Advent Series C

Sermon: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent

Text: Luke 1:5-25 (vv.15b, 16, 17)

Theme: The task of the church

Goal: The proclamation of Law and Gospel is to bring people back to the Lord and to prepare them to the encounter with the Lord.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: A silence of 400 years was broken when John the Baptist was announced by the angel and when he was born. The last prophet of the Old Testament time had been Malachi. 400 years is more than the history line of South Africa since the Europeans began to settle here. There was a big gap between the last prophet and the revelation of angel Gabriel to Zachariah. Many had lost their hope in God's promises; but many others were faithful waiting for the accomplishment of the promise given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and after this to King David and to many prophets. The Messiah would come! And the name John means: God is gracious! He never forgets His promises and He is faithful and gracious to accomplish them.

2000 years have passed since Jesus was on earth and delivered His promise to come again. It has been a long time and many are discouraged and tired of waiting. But He will come again! Advent is a time to think not only about the first coming of Jesus but about His second coming as well. Do we need another John the Baptist to prepare the way to the Lord? His story and his ministry are still absolutely current and God is working through His Church and through His ministers with the same message He delivered through John the Baptist.

I – To bring people back

When the angel announced to Zachariah that his wife Elizabeth would have a baby, the angel also told him what the task of that special boy would be: “Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.” If someone needs to be brought back, it means that he is far. To be far from God means to live in darkness and going to eternal destruction. When Jesus began to preach, the prophecy was recounted: “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Matthew 4:16). God is a God of love and He doesn't want anyone to be condemned. Therefore He sent John and sends His ministers to call people back to Him, to His gracious arms. The first message of John, the permanent message of the Christian Church is a message of repentance: Turn from your wicked ways and come back to the Lord, because He is gracious. The message of John was a vigorous message of repentance!

## II – To go before the Lord

As a forerunner, John would “go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous”, according to the words of the angel Gabriel. These are the last words of the Old Testament, when God prophesied through prophet Malachi: “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5, 6). John was not Elijah reincarnated as some say; but he came “in the spirit and power of Elijah”. His way of life in the desert, his preaching and ministering were very similar to the ministry of Elijah.

When John was born, his father Zachariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied: “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace” (Luke 1:76-79).

“To go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him” as John did is the task of the Christian Church as well. Jesus is still coming in His tender mercy in His Word and in the Holy Sacraments, giving people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of our sins. Without forgiveness no one can stand before the Lord. The Christian Church is God’s agency to offer, to proclaim and to give forgiveness by faith in Christ to all who repent of their sins. John called people to be baptized for remission of their sins. The Church baptizes for forgiveness; the Church absolves and declares “not guilty” those who come repented and confess their faith in Jesus; the Church gives the body and the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. This is how the Church goes before the Lord to prepare His way. Blessed are those who accept the message of repentance and faith, and who believe in the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”, as John proclaimed when he saw Jesus for the very first time.

III – To make people prepared for the Lord

Many accepted the message of John and when Jesus came they were prepared and followed Him. We read in the Gospel: “When he (John) saw Jesus passing by, he said: “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus” (John 1:35-37). They were the apostles John and Andrew. Many others followed Jesus due to the message of John the Baptist. And even when all were

dispersed when Jesus was arrested and put on the cross, after His resurrection they came together again and became witnesses of what had happened: The Lamb of God was sacrificed on behalf of the sins of all humankind, and by faith in Him everyone can have forgiveness and life, eternal life. And we are the fruits of this witness. Not only fruits, but we are the witnesses of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century “to make a people prepared for the Lord”. We are “John the Baptist” for our generation. The Lord will come again; not humble any more and laying in a manger; but with power and great glory to collect His elected from the four corners of the world and to condemn the unbelievers.

Conclusion: The story of John the Baptist is full of emotion from the beginning to the end. The appearance of the angel to the priest Zachariah in the temple; the pregnancy of Elizabeth at her old age, even though she was barren; the speech recovery of Zachariah when he gave the name “John” to the little one; his ministry along the Jordan, where he baptized hundreds and even Jesus; his tragic death due to the jealousy of a wicked woman... Jesus exalted him above all the prophets! (Luke 7:28). But he himself said in great humbleness: “But one more powerful that I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (Luke 3:16). He was only an instrument in God’s salvation plan “to bring people back to the Lord their God”, “to go before the Lord to prepare the way for Him”, and to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord”. Without the Lord Jesus, John would be nothing. So is it with the Christian Church, that has the same tasks: “To bring people back to the Lord their God”, “to go before the Lord to prepare the way for Him”, and to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord”. Let the message of repentance and faith in Christ abide in our hearths this Advent and Christmas again, and forever. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 29 November 2015