

Text: Matthew 3:1-12
Title: Prepare the Way

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The whole city is getting ready for Jesus. Last week it was the gates. This week it is the road.

Today God calls for the road to be made ready. The king is coming, but the road is not ready for Him to travel on.

We all hate roadwork. It's time-consuming. There are no quick fixes. It's annoying. But it's important, necessary work. If the road's in bad shape, it's not just uncomfortable, it can be dangerous.

The king's road needs lots of work. It's not straight. It's not level. It's full of potholes. It's crumbling. It's in need of major repair.

It's not enough to patch a few holes and fill in a few cracks. The whole road needs to be bulldozed, torn up and leveled.

The most important thing in any kind of construction is leveling. If the ground isn't level, the road won't be, either.

I've done a little bit of work with retaining walls, and the most important part is getting the ground level before you begin. If you don't start with a level foundation, the wall will be uneven, and there's no way to correct your mistake without tearing everything down and starting over.

Leveling is the most important job, but also the most difficult. Laying brick is easy. Leveling the ground is not.

Celebrating Christmas is easy. Celebrating Advent is not.

The world wants to rush into Christmas celebrations. And we give in on many accounts, even here at church.

Because Christmas celebrations are fun and exciting. We like to get together with our friends and relatives for good food and drink. We like to put out the festive decorations and the trees and the lights. We like getting and sending Christmas cards and gifts. We like hearing the Christmas story and singing Christmas carols.

We don't like Advent. We don't like waiting. Most of all, we don't like the message of Advent. We don't like people pointing out our mistakes and our faults. We don't like people telling us that we need to change. We don't like people calling us to repent.

But celebrating Christmas without Advent is like building without leveling the ground first. It's like laying asphalt or concrete on an uneven surface. It will eventually crack and crumble.

If you want to have a truly merry Christmas, you need to start with Advent.

The point of Advent is for the Lord to level you and straighten you out with His law. His law points out all the potholes and the crooked stretches in your life. During Advent, the Lord does construction on your life.

And His chief foreman is John the Baptist.

John was sent to prepare the way for the Jesus. To make the road ready for Him by preaching the law, by telling people how they had messed up. To get people ready to listen to Jesus.

John's message is harsh, and we don't want to hear it. We'd rather skip straight to Jesus.

Advent's message is harsh, and we'd rather skip straight to Christmas.

John's message, the message of Advent is: repent. Your life is crooked and uneven. You're in need of repair. You're like a crumbling road full of potholes. You need to change before Jesus comes. You're not ready for Him

Look at your life.

You know that you need to make changes in your life. Have you done anything about it? Have you truly changed your life, or have you grown content with things the way that they are?

Have you borne fruit? Have you done any good lately? Or have you been lazy and self-centered?

Do you have faith, or are you just here because of your parents and how you were raised?

This Advent we find ourselves standing with the Pharisees and Sadducees being accused by God's law.

Our lives have been fruitless.

We have been slow to repent.

We have trusted too much in our heritage than in our God. We need to repent.

God's law levels us, and destroys the uneven, crumbling path of our lives.

When we hear God's law, when we hear John the Baptist, we realize that we need someone to come and fix things.

We need a Savior. We need Christmas.

It's not just that we need a little vacation, or that we need to spend more time with our families, or that we need to cut loose and celebrate every now and then.

Christmas is a matter of life or death. Without Christmas, you would be total lost forever. Christmas is God's way of fixing the world and making things right- beginning with you and your life. But if you don't think that things need fixing, you'll miss out on the best part of Christmas.

That's what Advent teaches you. That's what Advent is all about. Advent shows you why we need Christmas in the first place.

Advent gets the road ready, makes everything all level and straight.

And Christmas is when the king comes down that road to you, humble and gentle, like a peasant riding on a donkey.

Christmas is when the king is born as a baby, wrapped in swaddling cloths and placed in a manger.

Advent is the time to get everything ready.

Before Zachary was born, we spent many weeks getting everything ready. Getting clothes and diapers and carseats and playpens, decorating the nursery and filling it with furniture, reading books and talking to other parents, going to the doctor and taking classes and doing everything we could to make sure that we were prepared for his birth.

That's Advent. Getting everything ready for Christmas. Not for the parties and gifts, but for the coming of Christ Himself. Not just for a cute little baby, but for the Savior of the world.

Jesus is coming, so it's time to get ready. It's time to give alms, to pray and to fast (for more on those three, come down for Bible Class).

Jesus who comes to us in the speaking of His Word. Jesus who comes to us in the Lord's Supper. Jesus who will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead.

Jesus is coming. And He's coming to do great things.

Isaiah tells us all about what Jesus is coming to do. He is coming to judge with righteousness and to bring justice for the poor and the meek.

He is coming to destroy the wicked.

He is coming to restore creation- to bring peace between lambs and wolves, leopards and goats, calves and lions, cows and bears. He comes to take you back to Eden- no pain, no death, no fighting or conflict.

And everyone will know it, to all the ends of the earth.

That's what Jesus is coming to do and to bring. All those good things for you.

So get ready, repent, make His way straight and level. Listen to John. Let the law do its work on you. Because Christmas is coming, Jesus is coming. Prepare the way of the Lord.