

December 15, 2002
AM Service – 3rd Sunday of Advent
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

The Way Prepared
Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"-

3 "a voice of one calling in the desert,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"

4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Why talk about John the Baptist and his message of repentance during Advent? Can't we hear about the happier subjects of Christmas like Peace and Joy and Love? Well yes, but not without first hearing the message of repentance. First there must be a turning from sin and turning to Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. Then, to them, Jesus promises the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And the fruit of having the Holy Spirit is love, joy peace and more.

Some must have questioned if John was the messiah because he announced: "Someone is coming soon who is far greater than I am--so much greater that I am not even worthy to be his slave." It was a job of a slave to stoop down to untie the thongs of his master's sandals. John shows real humility saying Jesus was so much greater than he that he was not even worth to do this menial task. "You see, I baptize you with water," John says, "but he (the one greater than I who is coming soon) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

Why did John say Jesus, who was his younger cousin, was greater?
Because of who He is:
Luke 2:8-12 NLT

(The night that Jesus was born) some shepherds were in the fields outside the village, guarding their flocks of sheep. 9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them,

and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terribly frightened, 10 but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! [v11 NIV Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.] 11 The Savior--yes, the Messiah, the Lord--has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David!

Here is why Jesus is called great: He is The Savior, The Messiah (or Christ), The Lord. Jesus is called the Savior (deliverer) and The Messiah (or the Greek equivalent: Christ): "anointed of God." It indicated the one promised and predicted in the OT who would come and die to forgive sins. The baby born in Bethlehem came to die and then rise from the dead to redeem humankind from sin and its consequences. Jesus is also called Lord: one having supreme power and authority (another name for God). Yes, a Savior has been born to *you*; He is Christ the Lord.

All people are searching for their identity and their destiny. But it can't be found except through a relationship with God. God created us – because He loves us – but we turned our backs on God. The Lord Jesus (God) came to this earth - the Savior, Messiah - to be the sacrifice to forgive the sin that separates us from God so that we could find our true identity as Children of God and our true destiny; to serve God and be with Him forever. Identity and destiny are gifts of God that can't be formed or found except in the context of a relationship with God. And a relationship with God is only possible through Jesus. We have all experienced painful events in our lives that have caused us emotional baggage and sinful strategies of survival. Only God knows our true self and only God can help us become our true self. But only after all the lies, pain and failures of the twisted old self have been washed away.

This would be possible through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is another reason why John said Jesus would be greater. He would baptize with a greater baptism.

John's baptism with water indicated immersion in the water of the Jordan River. John's baptism demonstrated repentance, humility, and willingness to turn from sin. This was the beginning of the spiritual process. John baptized people as a sign that they had asked God to forgive their sins and had decided to live, as he wanted them to live. Baptism was an outward sign of commitment. To be effective, it had to be accompanied by an inward change of attitude leading to a changed life. But John's baptism did not give salvation; it only prepared a person to welcome the coming Messiah and receive His message and His baptism.

John's statement, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, revealed the identity of the "one" coming after John as the promised Messiah. The coming of the Spirit had been prophesied as part of the Messiah's arrival:

"I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. (Isa 44:3)

“The time is coming . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people . . . For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jer 31:31-34)

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (Ezek 36:26-27)

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” (Joel 2:28-29)

The Old Testament promised a time when God would demonstrate His power among people and give special relationship and blessings to His people. This looked ahead to Pentecost (Acts 2), when the Holy Spirit would be sent by Jesus . . . empowering His followers to preach the gospel (with their lips and lives). All believers, those who would later come to Jesus Christ for salvation, would receive the Holy Spirit. When Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, the entire person would be transformed by the Spirit's power. Jesus would offer both forgiveness of sin and the power to live for Him. We need more than repentance to save us; we need the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

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In John's baptism a person enters the water. In Jesus Christ's baptism the Holy Spirit enters the person and makes them part of the Body of Christ. John's baptism was ceremonial cleansing that could not save. Jesus Christ's baptism is the presence of the Holy Spirit as evidence of Salvation. John's Baptism saturated people with water. Jesus Christ's baptism saturates you with the Holy Spirit.

Two baptisms. One is a baptism of repentance – turning from sin and turning to God. The other is a baptism of the Spirit. One baptism is for the forgiveness of sins the other is for a complete purging, power and renewal.

In Acts 2:38 Peter tells us how we receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

How is this different than what John had preached? It was a new promise, a new covenant. Repent and be baptized in the *name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins*. Acknowledge yourself as His follower and servant. It's equivalent to saying, “I publicly profess that I have embraced Jesus as my Savior/Messiah & Lord. I have accepted the religion of Jesus.” It is being baptized into His service - a consecrating of one's life to Him. It is a public profession to Him and His cause. To be baptized in the Name of Jesus is to be devoted to Jesus. The profession which they were to make amounted to this: a confession of sins; a hearty purpose to turn from them; a reception of Jesus as the

Messiah and as Savior; and a determination to become His followers and to be devoted to his service. Do this and your sins will be forgiven. Jesus only can forgive sin. We are forgiven only because of the atonement made by Jesus on the Cross. This baptism is a willingness to be pardoned by Jesus and a belief that He can pardon – He is the only means of pardoned sins. It is the conviction that I have sinned and am a sinner and there is no other way to find mercy and forgiveness than by faith in Jesus. Firmly believe the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Submit to His grace and Authority. Openly profess to be a follower and servant of the Lord Jesus. You must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. You can not just believe in God in whatever way you choose to believe in God. You must believe in Jesus. Renounce sins and be baptized into the faith of Christ and Jesus shall forgive your sin. Then, when we repent and believe, we receive the Holy Spirit to be influenced by The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person - the third person of the Godhead. There are not three Gods but three persons in one nature. One God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the Lord in the OT. He is called the Spirit of Christ in the NT. All the contact between God the Father, and Son on the one hand and the human soul on the other is through the Holy Spirit. When Jesus went back into heaven He sent the Holy Spirit just as He promised. He promised to send another Comforter. By “another” He meant another just like Himself. By Comforter He meant one who comes along side to help. Our English word “Comforter” is interesting. It is taken from two Latin terms: *con*, which means “with”; and *fortare*, from which our “fort” and “fortification” comes, which means “to strengthen or empower.” The Comforter, then, is One who comes with power, to make Christians strong. (W.T. Purkiser, *Beliefs That Matter Most*.)

A holy life for sure must be maintained. But it must first have a starting point. The water baptism of John in preparation for the coming of Jesus was a choice that happened in a moment of time. It signified a willingness to turn from sin to God. It had to be followed up with a life that expressed that choice to turn from sin to God, but it first was a choice and an act in a moment of time.

Living the life of the Spirit (a life influenced by the Holy Spirit) - set apart for God, empowered to live a holy life pleasing to Him, must be maintained. A holy life must be maintained. But the baptism must happen in a moment of time. Have you received this baptism? Have you received the Holy Spirit? Well, you can but it is your choice. Are you willing to belong to God exclusively? Are you willing to give all of yourself to Jesus and to His control? Are you willing to turn not only from sin but also from anything that hinders your relationship with God? Will you choose Jesus? Will you receive the Holy Spirit?

Jesus has come. He is God the Messiah. He can forgive your sins and empower you to live for God. He baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And He is coming again. Prepare the Way! Someone once said that if Shakespeare were to walk in the room right now we would all stand to greet him. But if Jesus were to enter we would fall at His feet and kiss the hem of His garment. Today show the same humility of John the Baptist. Today yield yourself completely to Jesus as your Master. Today prepare yourself for His coming.