

Advent “Be Fruitful”

Matthew 3: 1-12

People came out from all over the Jordan country side came out to see and hear John and they confessed their sins and were baptized

Parallels – John the Baptist – Jonathan Edwards - *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

On the day that Matthew is referring to John put the word to the religious professionals
Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire
Whoa!

Who warned you to flee God’s coming wrath? In other words... The fire of hell is waiting for you!

Doesn’t this make for a great Christmas Message?

Don’t worry its coming ... just not today

Fruitful or fruitless

Every tree that doesn’t bear fruit ... chopped down and thrown into the fire

We need to be clear on that words fruit and fire

“I baptize with water but one mightier that is coming will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire”.

☆ Interesting, and a little un-nerving, that the word fire appears three times in this passage ... and that John speaks of **two baptisms** one in water the other with fire

The Pharisees and Sadducees were publicly called out by John Why?

They weren’t there to repent they came to watch the show

They were so removed from the true intention of a “religious” leader that they didn’t recognize the work that God was accomplishing through John. John was telling them that their religious efforts would not save them – theirs was the greater destruction because they had used to pervert the truth

Self Absorbed Detachment

This past week the media covered a story of a young woman taking a picture of herself and a man standing behind her at the edge of a bridge about to commit suicide – but instead of trying to help him she was busy posting her discovery on line to her friends to see –

When later criticized she couldn’t understand what all the fuss was about – thinking she had no part in his decision to kill himself.

Have we really become that cold? That far removed?

Fire appears 3 Times – all have the same Hebrew root *Pur* which means fire

All come from the same place – God - Yet two refers to destruction – suffering - the other to baptism and preservation (new life)

Fire is always symbolic of judgment

But when fire doesn't destroy it's a picture of grace! Of Jesus sacrifice for us

- The burning bush in Exodus 3 on fire but not consumed
- The three Hebrew children in Daniel chapter 3 thrown in the furnace but they didn't even smell of smoke
- The Words of Isaiah 43:2, 3

"When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God ..."

When we fall into the arms of the Lord the fire that would have destroyed us instead preserves and empowers us – the fire of the Holy Spirit

So where does fruitful fit in?

Addressing the people of Israel God spoke through Jeremiah the Prophet

"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. Jeremiah 18:6 NLT

Potter and Clay

Most of us had some experience working with clay in High School

Have you ever observed what a lump of clay goes through before becomes pottery?

The hard stiff clay has to be pounded and pushed, pulled and kneaded, picked up and slammed down, kneaded until it becomes pliable, workable in the potter's hands.

Then it's placed on a wheel where it's stretched and shaped and finally put several times into the fire of the *kiln*, where it becomes a useful/sometimes beautiful piece of pottery

Ever look at the hands of a potter that's working with clay? His hands are coated with the clay -as he shapes it on the wheel.

→ Even when he is finished a residue of clay remains on his hands ingrained into his own skin

It reminds me of how God tells us that our names are written on His hands

"Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands ..." Isaiah 49:16

God uses the metaphor of the potter and clay because it describes the painful process of turning clay into pottery which includes going through the fire ... but the end result is beautiful

The process *is a baptism* a life altering - results in fruit (service to others)

This is the kind of fire John was talking about in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and with fire

Parents can relate to the potter in the raising of their children

How much pressure to I apply without damaging or misshaping the child?

Some parents give too much freedom – causing misbehaved, sometimes spoiled kids

While others are too strict and their children have more fear than love for them

When looking for direction, **God's Word** is the place to start

During my teaching career I endured hundreds of parent teacher conferences for either academic or behavioral problems

There were times that I knew that the advice I was offering to parents wasn't from professional training or personal intelligence it was God given Wisdom

Wisdom that comes from years of being shaped by the potters hand

Be Fruitful ...

Whether you know it or not one thing everyone wants is to bear fruit –

They want something special out of this life – we want it for our children ...

That's the stuff that dreams are made of!

We want to be fruitful – but few people really understand what having fruit that lasts looks like – outside of God it is impossible

That's where you come in – where the years of baptism the clay in the potters hand no count!

→ You know the thing about fruit is this ... the fruit from a flower or a tree or vegetable is not self-serving - it provides nourishment or pleasure to others the real joy is not self indulgent its others oriented

☆ **This church has great potential** but to realize that potential it needs the fruit God has been growing in you

The investment you make here – what you put in here can make a difference for generations yet to come Think about that!

How would you like to put a smile on God's face this Christmas?

Let God begin to nourish others with the fruit he has been growing in you. You can start here in this place.

- Sunday school
- teen and young adult ministries
- music worship team
- writing
- ushering
- carpentry– painting
- cleaning/ maintaining
- serving on leadership boards
- All of ways to help to serve to bear fruit

I 'm convinced you have God given creative genius within you waiting to be tapped awaiting your investment into others on His behalf

Prepare the way of the Lord – Be Fruitful

Let's Pray