

PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

Second Week in Advent (December 8-14)

Prepare the Way With Sincere Repentance

Devotion #1: Isaiah 11:1-10



READ THE TEXT

- ¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
- ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge
and of the fear of the LORD -
- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.
He will not judge by what
he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
- ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions
for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth
with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips
he will slay the wicked.
- ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
- ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion
and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
- ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
and the young child
put his hand into the viper's nest.
- ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full
of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.
- ¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as
a banner for the peoples; the nations will
rally to him, and his place of rest will be
glorious.

READ THE DEVOTION

How far back can you trace your family tree? You probably know the names of your grandparents. Do you know the names of your great-grandparents? What about the names of your great-great-grandparents? We call this — the names of our ancestors — a “family tree.”

If you would trace Jesus’ family tree backwards, it would come to a man named Jesse. Jesse was the father of King David, the greatest of all the kings of Israel. But many of King David’s descendants did not care about the LORD. As an act of judgment, God took the royal throne away from that family. Imagine how sad that was! Can you imagine if your family was a royal family, ruling over a nation, and then one day that came to an end? That is what happened to Jesse’s family.

We see that at Christmas. Even though Jesus is a direct descendant of King David, when he is born he is not treated as royalty. He didn’t have a palace to sleep in, but only a manger. Jesus’ parents were not royal or even wealthy. Joseph was just a carpenter.

In this lesson, the prophet Isaiah, who lived a long time before Jesus, saw that this was going to happen. He saw that Jesse’s family would be humbled. That mighty family tree, which once contained kings, would be cut down and turned into a stump. But Isaiah also saw that stump would eventually start to grow again. King David would have a great-great-great-great (and many more greats) grandson who would once again be king. This new king would create a new type of kingdom. It would be a perfect kingdom. It was going to be a place so wonderful and so peaceful that you could put a baby next to a poisonous snake and not be afraid. For in this new kingdom no one will ever be hurt or harmed or killed.

So... a great-great-great (many greats) grandson of David who would establish a perfect kingdom where no one would die or get hurt. Can you guess who it is? It is Jesus, of course.

God takes sin seriously. God hates sin! That is why he took the royal throne away from David's family — to teach them how bad sin is. But God is also so loving and merciful. That is why he sent Jesus into the world. By dying and rising for us, Jesus forgave our sins. And Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to us to give us the gift of faith, so that we might be part of his kingdom.

The fact that God hates sin so much makes us want to turn away from our sins: disobeying mom or dad, gossiping about a kid in our class, disrespecting the teacher, fighting with our brother, holding grudges. We know God hates those types of actions, and so we want to leave those things behind. But the most amazing thing about God is that even when we fail to leave those things behind and slip into sin, he forgives us simply because of what Jesus did when he came on that first Christmas. And God doesn't just forgive us. He promises us a perfect home, where the wolf and the lamb can live in peace. That amazing kindness of God just makes us want to turn away from our sin all the more.

TALK ABOUT THE LESSON

The following are questions you can ask your children to try and drive home the point of this lesson. They are geared towards different ages. You can use as many or as few as needed.

- For the very young: Show them this picture. Ask, *"In this lesson, it talks about putting a wolf and a lamb together. It talks about putting a lion and a cow together. What do you think would happen if we put those animals together in our backyard?"*

Answer: The wolf and lion would kill and eat the other animals, obviously. The point of this question is to illustrate that heaven will be so much nicer than earth. There will be no death. Nothing will hurt anything else. Parents, do not be afraid to use this lesson to paint a delightful picture of heaven for your young children. It would not be

overstating Scripture to say, *"Wouldn't it be amazing to be able to pet a lion? We might get to do that in heaven!"* You are simply creating in your child a longing for the better world that is to come.

- For slightly older children: Ask, *"The fact that Jesus has a family tree... that you can trace his ancestors... proves that he is not just true God, but also fully human. What are some reasons it is comforting to know that Jesus is a human being?"*

Answer: Since Jesus is a human being, he understands us. Tell your children that no matter what hardship they are facing, Jesus experienced the same hardship. He was a child, just like they were. He knew what it was like to be picked on or teased. Because he understands us, we should be quick to go to him in prayer when we are troubled. And because he is true God, we can trust that he can do what is necessary to help us.

- For older children/teens: Ask, *"God once promised that King David's descendants would rule forever. But the nation of Israel doesn't even have a king anymore. Did God lie to David?"*

Answer: No! God cannot lie. Everything God has ever promised has come true! David's descendants no longer rule over the political nation of Israel. But Jesus Christ, who is a direct descendant of David, rules over the universe. And he will reign over everything for the benefit of believers for all of time.

END WITH PRAYER

King Jesus, we understand how much you hate sin. Sin hurts us and others. Send your Holy Spirit to us through the Word we have studied so that we might have power to turn away from sin. Thank you for paying for our sin on the cross. Because you rose for us, we know that one day we also will rise from the dead and live forever in your perfect kingdom.

Amen.

PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

Second Week in Advent (December 8-14)

Prepare the Way With Sincere Repentance

Devotion #2: Acts 3:19-26



READ THE TEXT

¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,
²⁰and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.
²¹He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²²For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you.
²³Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.
²⁴"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' ²⁶When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

READ THE DEVOTION

Think about the last time you did something wrong, something really bad. Maybe you took something that wasn't yours. Maybe you told a lie to your boss. Maybe you said something so mean that it made someone else cry. Think of something horrible that you have done.

So when you did that bad thing, how did you feel? You felt awful! If it was a sin you committed in secret, you probably worried about getting caught. You felt sick to your stomach because you know you couldn't hide your sin forever... that eventually secret sins are found out.

If you hurt someone, you might have felt awful when it dawned on you how you would feel if the tables were turned and *you* had been hurt like that.

Or maybe part of what made you feel so bad was you know that God saw that sin. Because you love God you were upset that you did something that offended him.

What is the only thing that can bring you relief at that time? Repentance.

Repentance is when you bring those sins that are making you sick out in the open and confess them to God. You don't hide them anymore. You don't pretend they don't exist. You just confess your sin boldly, "Here it is, God! I'm not going to deny it. I have sinned!" Our lesson says when we do that, it is "refreshing." You just feel better! What makes you feel better? God's goodness. When you repent, confessing your sins to God, he doesn't scold you and say, "You *should* be sorry!" He does not say he *might* forgive us if we try harder to avoid that sin in the future. Our lesson says that God wipes our sins out! He immediately and completely forgives them. God can do that, because Jesus paid for our sins with his own blood.

What sin are you holding onto right now? What secret sin is eating you up inside, because you are afraid of being found out? Do you want relief? Then repent! Turn away from that sin and turn to God. Confess your sins today. All of them! God isn't going to hammer you. He is going to comfort you with his love and forgiveness. He is going to assure you that in your baptism, those sins were washed away. And God is going to send you the Holy Spirit who will live in you and help you to try and avoid those sins in the future.

You will be refreshed!

TALK ABOUT THE LESSON

The following are questions you can ask your children to try and drive home the point of this lesson. They are geared towards different ages. You can use as many or as few as needed.

- For the very young: Ask, *“What is one sin that you did today for which you want to repent?”*

Answer: Your child will probably be able to come up with something. If not, do not be afraid to confess to them something you did or thought that day for which *you* would like to repent. The point you want to make — Christmas is all about forgiving that sin. Not presents or decorations or vacation. Christmas is about forgiveness. Jesus was born so that on the cross he could win forgiveness for that sin. Assure your child that sin is forgiven, and that God will help them try not to commit that sin tomorrow.

- For slightly older children: Ask, *“In our devotion we said that when we do something wrong, we generally feel sick afterwards. That is because of our conscience. Why is that a good thing, to feel bad when we sin?”*

Answer: Feeling bad is a sign that something is wrong. If you have a sore throat, you know something is wrong. When you break a bone, it hurts. That is good! You know something is wrong. Likewise, it is good that we are able to feel bad when we sin. It is no fun to feel bad, but it tells us that something is wrong. But we take that bad feeling to God — our guilt and our shame — and he takes it all away. He tells us how he will always forgive us, and that makes us feel the opposite of bad! His love “refreshes” us.

- For older children/teens: Ask, *“The first verse of our lesson said, ‘Repent and turn to God.’ So it describes repentance as a type of turning. What do we turn away from when we repent? What do we turn to?”*

Answer: In repentance, we turn away from our sin. We want nothing to do with it anymore. We turn to God’s love and God’s forgiveness and to the better way of life he lays out in his Word.

END WITH PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we repent tonight of all our sins. We are not going to lie and say we have not sinned. We have sinned many times today. We are not going to pretend that our sins are not a big deal. We know that you are holy, and therefore every sin offends you. But Christmas tells us that you are also merciful and loving. For you sent Jesus to take our sin away by his life and death and resurrection. Just as you sent us Jesus, we ask you to send us the Holy Spirit through the Word we have studied today. With the Holy Spirit’s help, we will strive tomorrow to avoid those sins for which we have repented today. Amen.

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Prepare the Way with Sincere Repentance

Devotion #3: Matthew 3:1-12



READ THE TEXT

¹In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ²and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." ³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

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

⁴John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

READ THE DEVOTION

When you call someone a snake, it is always an insult, isn't it? When you call someone a snake, it means you think they are being evil. In the lesson we just read a very important man named John the Baptist called some people a "brood of vipers." He called them a big pile of snakes!

John was not trying to be mean. He was trying to warn a group of people called the Pharisees. John the Baptist's job was to get people ready to meet the Son of God. He did that by telling people to repent of their sins. But the Pharisees did not think they were all that sinful. The Pharisees went to church. They read their Bible. They gave offerings. They thought that because they did those things, they were better than other people. They assumed, "God has to love me more than the people who don't go to church."

The Pharisees would ignore the sins in their life, things like arrogance or greed or gossip. They thought that since they read their Bible and went to church, it didn't really matter that they did those things. They figured that the good they did outweighed the bad. They forgot that God is holy, and he created us to be holy. God created us to be perfect, without *any* sin.

So John the Baptist called the Pharisees snakes. He told them that it is evil to think that your sins are not that bad. He told them that it is evil if you think that going to church or saying some prayers means you are ready to meet the Son of God. You are *not* ready to meet Jesus unless you admit that you are sinful and desperately need a Savior. Again, John was not being mean. He was trying to get the Pharisees to see how much danger they were in. If they did not repent of their sin, then instead of saving them Jesus would have to condemn them to the fires of hell.

So as we prepare for Christmas, let us do so by remembering what real repentance is.

Repentance is not going to church every week and mumbling a confession of sins without thinking about what we are saying. Repentance is not trying to make up for the bad we did today by doing more good tomorrow.

Repentance is being disgusted by our sins and admitting they make God disgusted too, even if the rest of the world thinks we look like “good church-going people.” Repentance is admitting that when it comes to obtaining eternal life we are completely helpless and desperately need salvation. Repentance is believing that the one born on Christmas is just that — the Savior, Christ the Lord. Repentance is trusting that only because of what Jesus did, our salvation and our eternity in heaven are assured. Repentance will be demonstrated by fruits of repentance. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will struggle against those sins.

John the Baptist preached the Word of God to the people, so that through that Word the Holy Spirit might give people the power to produce true repentance. May the Spirit do the same for us today.

TALK ABOUT THE LESSON

The following are questions you can ask your children to try and drive home the point of this lesson. They are geared towards different ages. You can use as many or as few as needed.

- For the very young: Ask, “*When we hurt someone, what are some ways we can show them that we are truly sorry?*”

Answer: We can tell them we’re sorry and ask for forgiveness. We will also try and not hurt that person again. This is meant to illustrate fruits of repentance. We know our sins offend God. Therefore, since we love God, when we repent of our sins we won’t just say that we’re sorry for them. We will struggle to avoid committing those sins in the future. Parents, be sure to be crystal clear. We do not struggle against our sin so that God loves us. He loves us already! We struggle because he loves us and proved that love beyond all doubt when he sent Jesus on Christmas.

- For slightly older children: Ask, “*The Pharisees thought that if they did something*

sinful, they could balance it out by doing someone good. Why will that not work?”

Answer: In the devotion we said that God created us to be in his image — holy and perfect. If I commit one sin and then do ten good things, I’m not perfect or holy. This does NOT mean that we shouldn’t try and set things right with others when we do wrong. For example, say someone steals \$10 from his mom’s purse. When he repents, he will give that \$10 back. But giving the money back (even with interest!) wouldn’t erase the fact that he stole the \$10. So he would give the money back to show he’s sincerely sorry, but not to erase his sin. Only Jesus can do that.

- For older children/teens: Ask, “*Twice in our lesson John the Baptist describes how Jesus himself will eventually throw unrepentant people into the fire of hell. How might that image be shocking to people today? How does that differ from the way a lot of people view Jesus?*”

Answer: When people think of Jesus, they focus on his love. However, Jesus is both perfectly loving *and* perfectly holy. Because he is holy, he hates sin with a hatred that we cannot fathom. When he sees sin, he demands there be punishment. But because he is loving, he was willing to take that punishment for sin upon himself. When someone does not repent, they are rejecting the loving work of Jesus. All that is left for them is Jesus’ wrath, which is just as real as Jesus’ love.

END WITH PRAYER

Most Holy Spirit, just as we need you to give us the power to believe God’s Word, so also we need you to give us the power to produce sincere repentance. Help us to do that! Help us to acknowledge how dangerous and disgusting sin is. Help us to trust that in our baptism, you washed us clean and covered us in Jesus’ righteousness, so that when God the Father looks at us he sees people who are as holy as Jesus. Finally, help us to fight against sin with all our strength as a way of giving glory to you, the Father, and Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.