

Third Sunday in Advent  
December 15, 2024  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
A Real Christmas Results in Great Joy  
Luke 3:7-18 (EHV)

*So John kept saying to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, “You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup>Therefore produce fruits in keeping with repentance! Do not even think of saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ because I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. <sup>9</sup>Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is going to be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

*<sup>10</sup>The crowds began to ask him, “What should we do then?” <sup>11</sup>He answered them, “Whoever has two shirts should share with the person who has none, and whoever has food should do the same.” <sup>12</sup>Tax collectors also came to be baptized. They said, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup>To them he said, “Collect no more than what you were authorized to.” <sup>14</sup>Soldiers were also asking him, “And what should we do?” He told them, “Do not extort money from anyone by force or false accusation. Be satisfied with your wages.”*

*<sup>15</sup>The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Christ. <sup>16</sup>John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But someone mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” <sup>18</sup>Then with many other words, he appealed to them and was preaching good news to the people.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

It can be interesting to connect two passages from the Bible that are not closely connected. Take the first and last verses in the section from Luke 3 today. “You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ...with many other words, he appealed to them and was preaching good news to the people.” I don’t know about you, but if a prophet of God called me the offspring of vipers, I would not take that as good news and I shouldn’t, should I? The theme for today is “A Real Christmas Results in Joy.” The front of the service folder has the word “JOY” in big letters. The pink/rose candle we lit today on the Advent wreath is the “joy” candle. Yet, we are still in the penitential season of Advent. We are in a time focused on repentance. Repentance is supposed to be a sad time, right? Or can we rejoice in repentance? As we go through the second part of Luke 3 this morning, we will see how repentance and joy go together to make for a real Christmas.

### **False Repentance Results in Wrath**

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This is not good news. John is warning the people against false repentance. Many people came out to see him and some of them only wanted to be seen by the crowds as doing spiritual stuff. They were not interested in true repentance. They did not confess their sins. They did not intend to change their ways. For they were descendants of Abraham and trusted their lineage more than the words of their God. These words of John can be a warning for us if we think that we are safe

from God's wrath because... "I'm Lutheran...My parents are so and so...I've been a member of this church for so many years..." While these can be very good and beneficial things, trusting in a denominational title, our family name or having our name in a membership book somewhere does not save us from our sin. It is false repentance to trust in these things and think we are doing what God demands without confessing our sins and desiring to change our ways. The end will not be good for those who refuse to repent.

### **True Repentance Results in Joyful Lives**

But not all who came out to the Jordan refused to repent. The Holy Spirit brought many to true repentance. Their minds were changed about sin. They desired God's forgiveness. John faithfully administered God's forgiveness to them as he baptized them in the river. These repentant believers then wanted to know how to live as repentant and forgiven children of God.

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John gives these believers some specific fruits of repentance to show joy of forgiveness in their lives. We often talk about repentance in two parts – sorrow over our sin and faith in the forgiveness of sins through Christ. The fruits of repentance are in a way the third part of repentance. However, fruits of repentance do not influence our forgiveness but instead are a result of our forgiveness. Works are a result of forgiveness in Christ, not a way to earn forgiveness. And John is quite clear that such fruits will be evident in a Christian's life. This is how we show joy in repentance and faith in Christ.

Fellow baptized children of God, we have been forgiven of all our sins through the life and death of Jesus Christ. In addition, God may provide you with more than enough food, clothing and money. John encourages us to show our joy by sharing with those in need. Joyful giving to those in need is a fruit of repentance and not only brings the receiver of the gift joy and brings the giver joy, but also gives thanks to the Lord Jesus for his mercy to us.

The next piece of advice John gives is for specific occupations. These were not occupations of honor among the Jews. Tax collectors worked for the Roman Empire and often took more than was necessary. Soldiers enforced the occupation of Judea by the Roman Empire. These soldiers had authority to do about anything they wanted and could abuse that authority to enrich themselves. Not many Jews liked tax collectors and soldiers. We might think that John would tell them people with less than desirable occupations to go out and get a respectable job. Change careers. No believer should work for the wicked Romans. But he doesn't. Instead, they are to stay in their vocation and carry out their jobs with honesty, integrity, compassion and contentment.

How can we show our joy in the forgiveness of sins through Christ as we carry out our vocations and occupations in life? While there could be jobs and situations where a Christian simply cannot continue to be, generally we would not need to change careers to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. Think of some of the careers that have a bad reputation in society. The used car salesman who believes in Jesus can be honest and fair and not take advantage of customers. The tax collector can enforce the rules with fairness and understanding and not abuse their authority. The politician can refrain from lies and half-truths and instead seek to represent all of his constituents instead of benefiting himself or a small group of supporters. The personal injury attorney can be truly interested in helping their clients who have suffered great harm instead of lining their own pockets.

Whatever your vocation is now and whatever it may be in the future, whether you are working or at home or retired, serve the Lord and the people he puts into your life with joy. For you are forgiven in Christ and he gives you opportunities each day to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. This is our joy in life.

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Of course, the people who received repentance, baptism, and forgiveness at the Jordan River were happy and excited and joyful. The Christ, the Messiah is supposed to bring joy to his people and forgiveness of sins. Maybe John is the Christ. They were like children looking at presents under the tree who wake up each morning asking if it is Christmas yet. They wanted to see their promised Savior. John had to do what parents of children eager to open those presents do. He told them to wait but it would be soon. John is not the Christ, but the Son of God had already been born of Mary. Soon, the Christ would be at the Jordan River and be baptized by John. Soon Jesus would preach and teach and perform mighty miracles to show that he is the Christ. And in just a few years, the Christ would secure the forgiveness given and promised at the Jordan River to all who were baptized by paying for sins with his holy, precious blood shed on the cross. And in the prophet's mind, soon the Christ would return to gather his people from this world of sin to himself, into his barn, to the place he is preparing in his Father's house for all who believe. This is good news! This is joy!

May the good news of a Savior born for you give you great joy because of the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal joy. And we pray that the Lord gives us many opportunities to show our joy by producing fruits of repentance in our lives.

Amen.