



**“In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wildernesses of Judea, proclaiming; ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, ‘The voice crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’”**

**(Matthew 3:1-3)**

Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

This weekend we begin the season of Advent—the four weeks leading up to Christmas. However, we can’t reach Bethlehem without first passing through the desert; we can’t hear the voices of angels singing without first hearing the voice of one crying out in the wilderness; we can’t experience the joy of Christmas unless we’ve first heard the call to preparation and repentance. Before we meet the infant laying in the manger, we’re confronted by John the Baptist. John isn’t like the other Christmas characters—in fact, he sticks out like a sore thumb! His gaunt, haggard figure and long hair flowing down over his camel skin clothing clashes with the more familiar yuletide figures of Mary and Joseph, shepherds and wise men. However, it’s not so much his appearance that makes John an unpopular Christmas figure, but rather his words. John’s message is blunt, aggressive, and straight forward; “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Advent wouldn’t be Advent without a word from John the Baptizer. His message may appear to be too harsh and confrontational for this time of year; however, it’s a message that God wants us to hear! During Advent, we are called to “keep watch” and to “stay awake;” to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. The best way to prepare for Advent and Christmas doesn’t involve shopping, decorating, or baking, but rather taking an honest look at ourselves and seeing what changes need to be made in order for us to play host to the coming King!

If our hearts are a desert wilderness, John calls us to nourish them with prayer and the reading of Scripture. If our lives are busy and over burdened, he calls us to clear the way for God and to make straight the path. John’s message is all about “turning.” As we pay attention to what God is doing in our lives and in the world around us, we turn our attention away from our own cares and concerns to what God desires. That’s what repentance is all about—turning away from sin and whatever else is distracting us from God and turning towards Him. In John’s wandering; in his alertness; in his wide-awake-ness in the wilderness; he came to understand an important truth: When we make room for God in our lives, everything changes! Some things get turned upside down; other things get set right-side up. Bumpy roads get smoothed out; low spots in our lives get lifted up; and what was once seemed insurmountable becomes an easy climb.

I encourage you over the next four weeks to take the time each day to intentionally prepare the road to your heart, upon which Jesus will travel this Advent and Christmas season. I commend to you the Advent Calendar of Daily Scripture Readings on the reverse side of this letter and the attached list of activities to assist you in your preparation.

Sometimes we think we can only hear God in moments of peace and quiet. However, John the Baptist shows us that in the midst of all kinds of wild and confusing things, God shows up! During Advent, we have the opportunity to practice paying attention to the promises of God even in the midst of all the distractions. What is God turning upside down in your life? What pathway might He be opening up in front of you?

Kathy, Jonah, Gracie, Annie, and I wish you and your family a blessed Advent and joy-filled Christmas!

Faithfully,

The Rev. Christopher R. Doering  
Lead Pastor & Rector