

ADVENT 2
MALACHI 3:1-4
PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11
LUKE 3:1-6
DECEMBER 8, 9, 2018

YEAR C

Into the political world came John the Baptist. To the leaders of the religious community came John the Baptist. We might be able to understand why John might go to the leaders of the government and the political world. We would expect John to preach to them about loving their neighbor, caring for those entrusted to them and otherwise working for justice and peace. We look for this in our government leaders. When we come to church we expect that our church leaders are already working for the good of those entrusted to them. We expect honesty in preaching and teaching. We hope the leaders of the church are working for justice and peace in the church and in our land. We may not expect that John would need to preach to the church. It is as they say, "preaching to the choir." Yet, John came for the political leaders and to the religious leaders.

Luke 3:1-3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene,²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,

John the Baptist must have been an interesting sight to see. People were drawn to John for a variety of reasons. They were drawn to John like we might be drawn to a street corner preacher with a megaphone. We might be uncomfortable with the method by which the preacher preaches but at the same time we are curious about the methods of delivering a message. John's appearance was in contrast to the way things were. Rome was in control of the government and the High Priest was in charge of the Temple and of the Jewish religion.

Roman rule was not about fairness, compassion or justice. It was about power. The emperor, governor and the others in power were about keeping the power. This was no democracy but involved oppression and coercion. The same could be said for the high priesthood. They were not about caring for the people but about forcing their ways on all others. They did not worry about loving God or loving their neighbors. They were about loving themselves and getting what they could. There was no separation of church and state. The high priest were in power only because the Roman government allowed it. The two were tied closely together.

Luke 3:4-6 ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Listen to the one crying out in the wilderness! Listen to him as he proclaims this new message that exhorts us to prepare the way so the Lord finds easy access into our hearts and our lives. John the Baptist proclaims that people needed to repent so that their sins are forgiven. As we read these words today it is as if John is speaking to us even as we are here in this place. John is speaking to us offering words of encouragement for those that are hurting. John the Baptist comes with the words of truth for a people in desperate need of the truth. The people of Israel were a people looking for a messiah that would deliver them from their enemies. Their enemies were not the Romans, although the Romans were certainly an enemy force to be reckoned with. The enemies were not Annas and Caiaphas but they needed to reform their lives and the life of the Temple. The enemies were very similar to the enemies you and I must deal with on a daily basis.

Some of the enemies we might face today are the diseases and issues that might send you to the doctor or a hospital. Those enemies take us to places and into situations we would rather not be. Some of those enemies have names

we would rather not say but are very much part of our lives. As we fight our enemies we make the path straight for the Lord to minister to us where we are. We might think of enemies that compromise us financially. We might think of those situations that take our loved ones from us and leave us alone. John comes offering words of hope. He says that the valleys are filled and the mountains and hills are brought low. He is not talking so much about the rich becoming poor and the poor becoming rich. He is telling us that wealth is not that important to the Lord. The most important thing to the Lord is that you and I are cared for. We are taken care of and brought to the place of salvation: We come to where all flesh shall see the salvation of God. The salvation God give does not come to us from the government. It is told about in the church but this salvation does not come from the church but from God.

What is the salvation that all people will see? How will we come to know this salvation of God? Simeon declares in Luke 2:30-32 "**My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel**" He makes this declaration as he holds the baby Jesus in his arms experiencing a new revelation from God. This new revelation changed his thoughts about death. Seeing the one who would bring salvation allowed him to see his death as a coming home party instead of a trip that leads to total separation from God.

Later in the gospel of Luke we hear about salvation when Jesus tells Zacchaeus, "**Today salvation has come to this house**" (19:9). What had come to his house? Jesus had invited himself over and there was change in Zacchaeus' thinking about wealth.

The truth is that Jesus has come into our lives just as John told us he would. We have the assurance that God is with us and that Jesus is coming into the world. Because we know Jesus as Lord and Savior we have a new thought about our lives. The Lord gives us the assurance of new life through Christ our

Lord. Jesus, the Savior, has come, and enemies are still all around us. There are still armies that invade and suppress people. There are still germs that invade bodies. There are still political systems that seem to get in the way of caring for people. There are still problems in the church and our world isn't what we want or think it should be. How can we say that God's salvation has come? Nothing seems to have changed. There are still hills and valleys and crooked and rough roads. There are inequalities between people. All are not treated equally. Many people do not see God's salvation.

Often people miss God's salvation because they are looking in the wrong places. They want to see a powerful military leader or a great physician. The savior is a baby in a manger. The salvation is seen in the face of an infant or in an adult who invites himself for supper. Seeing God's salvation means seeing Jesus as one who doesn't save himself from death on the cross. He doesn't save himself from the cross but saves us through the cross. Jesus invites us to come together treating each other with respect and love. You and I have been empowered to serve the Lord. We serve the Lord by speaking out when we see injustice in our church and in our government. We speak out when we see that others are oppressed simply because they are different. We proclaim and live this salvation as we live according to faith and in love for our neighbor.

John came proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Let us also use this repentance for the forgiveness of sins to serve the Lord proclaiming the message of salvation and love. AMEN