

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent  
December 3, 2017

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Mount Olive Lutheran Church

Theme: Baptism prepares you for the coming of Christ  
Text: **1 Peter 3:18-22**

**<sup>18</sup> For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup> who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.**

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Dear fellow redeemed – **Grace and peace be yours in abundance** (1 Peter 1:2). The Word of God on which today’s sermon is based is our 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson from 1 Peter chapter 3. Let us pray: *Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight. You are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Well, Thanksgiving has come and gone... December is upon us... and it’s that time of year again. It’s time to get ready for...that’s right... Christmas. For millions of Americans, and I’m sure for many of you here today, the Christmas preparations are already underway. Black Friday, and Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday were in full swing again this past week. People were waiting in long lines to buy gifts, or surfing the web for the chance to maybe get that special item at a special price. Maybe some of you have put up your Christmas tree already. Hung some lights. Put a wreath on the door. Yes, preparations are underway.

But even after all the lights have been strung, every present purchased and wrapped, are you truly ready for Christmas? Are you prepared?

Today at church we start a brand new Church year with the first season of the Church year called Advent. Advent means “coming” and during Advent we focus on how Jesus came to us once here on earth, and how he comes to us now in his Word and Sacraments, and also how he will come again in glory on the Last Day. Preparation is what the season of Advent is really all about. Are you prepared to truly appreciate again the real meaning of Christmas? Are you prepared to meet Jesus in his Word? Are you ready for his final return? Are you prepared to meet your Maker?

These are the types of questions we need to ask ourselves this time of year. Sure we can prepare our homes and our families for all the upcoming Christmas celebrations whether here at church or with family and friends. But during this special season of Advent we prepare ourselves best by reflecting upon the Word of our God. Today as we consider God’s Word spoken through the apostle Peter we hear how...

**Baptism prepares us for the coming of Christ.**

Baptism prepares our hearts for Christmas.

Baptism prepares us to meet Jesus in his Word and his Supper.

And baptism prepares us for his final return.

You know we’re not so different from the people that Peter originally wrote these words to. They were people who lived in a culture where Christians were looked down on as foolish and ignorant. As much as we like to say we still live in a “Christian” nation, real, biblical Christianity is not really accepted by

many today. If you say you believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven people call you naïve. If you say you believe that the entire Bible is God's Word, even the parts that condemn sinful behavior that is accepted in society, well... people may call you judgmental or intolerant or unloving. If you tell people that the real reason for Christmas is not gifts and parties or even family and friends but Golgotha and a bloody cross... yeah people will call you a buzz kill. And so when we stand up for the truth of God's Word today we do face opposition.

The people Peter wrote to knew all about opposition. In fact, that is why he wrote this letter. He wanted to encourage them to stand firm in their faith even in the face of opposition and persecution. And what better way to encourage them than to remind them of the victory that was already won for them. Peter wrote: **For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.** The message of Jesus Christ crucified is the best motivation Christians have to be willing to suffer for Christ. Because they know that his suffering ended in glory. And so will theirs.

Imagine yourself on a battlefield. Bullets whizzing by your head. Explosions all around you. Surrounded by noise and chaos and fear. What if, in the middle of this battle, someone was able to come up to you and show you a vision of the future, show you how the battle would end, show you that you would win? How might that change the way you fight?

Peter is really doing that very thing for the Christians he is writing to. He tells them that Jesus death has reconciled them to God. Then he reminds them that Jesus victory on the cross was certain by pointing to the resurrection. And our Savior who died and rose Peter also says: **has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.**

Yes, Jesus has won the victory. So for us who still battle for a little while here on earth, we can fight the good fight of faith knowing that the outcome for us is certain. We don't need to struggle, we don't need to worry, we don't ever need to be afraid.

Easier said than done, right?

I mean, let's be honest here. There are plenty of times when we still don't feel prepared to meet Christ. Our hearts are easily filled with distractions leading up to Christmas and we, like so many others in America, forget the real reason for the season. We forget, as Paul writes in 1 Timothy, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners** (1 Timothy 3:15).

And our preparation to meet Jesus in his Word too often is lost in the business of our lives. We do little to prepare for Sunday worship other than trying to be here on time for the service. We skip reading a devotion or Scripture reading each day because of the million things on our schedule. And so we forget the one thing that we really need – the Word of God. We neglect the one thing in our lives that can give us strength and courage to get through a busy and stress filled day.

And if we aren't ready for Christmas, or even for church on Sunday, how can we feel prepared to meet our Judge on the final day? What can we point to that will cause him to hold back his wrath?

Well, Peter answers all these fears and all our failures with a simple illustration and a promise from God to you. He tells us that the same Christ who died and rose again: **went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

There is a lot to unpack in those verses. But Peter is really just explaining baptism by using the great flood as an illustration. That is why Peter talks about the **spirits in prison who disobeyed** back in the

time of Noah. After Jesus came to life on Easter he went into hell and proclaimed his victory over his enemies. That descent into hell by Jesus gives us certainty that the war is over because we can see our Savior standing victoriously over his enemies. Now, some of those enemies included the souls of the people who had rejected God in the days of Noah. As we heard in our 1<sup>st</sup> lesson today the people in Noah's time had turned their backs on God. It had gotten so bad in fact that if God did not intervene the whole world would have been lost in sin and unbelief.

And so in order to bring both judgment on the world and salvation to the world God sent a great flood that killed every living thing that was not inside the ark that Noah built. And when the rain began to pour and the floodgates of the deep burst open the ark rose above all the destruction and death beneath. And so God used the waters of the flood to destroy unbelief and rescue his chosen people.

And that is the same thing that happens in the waters of baptism. That is why Peter uses the great flood as an illustration. Cause in baptism the unbelieving sinful nature in us is drowned and the chosen child of God is rescued. Yes, through baptism you are saved. This is no mere symbolic act. This washing using plain water with the Word of God actually saves your soul from death. It connects you to the salvation won for you by Jesus. Peter calls it the pledge – literally a “legal claim” to a good conscience toward God. God gives you a guarantee in baptism, he clothes you with the robes of Jesus perfect life and innocent death. And so you have a promise from God that your conscience is free from guilt in his sight.

And so when we ask ourselves again how can we be prepared for Christ's coming, this time we have a clear answer. How can we truly prepare our hearts for the coming Christmas season? How can we meet God in his Word with confidence and joy? How can we be sure we will meet Christ without fear when he returns to judge the world? - - One word: BAPTISM.

Baptism washes away sin and connects us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who came first in the flesh. You can look forward to Christmas knowing the real reason for the season: **Christ Jesus came into this world to save you** (1 Timothy 3:15).

Baptism reminds us every day that we have a legal claim to a good conscience before God, we have this pledge he's given us. So no matter what our hearts say and what the world says we know how God really sees us. And so we are prepared to meet Christ as he comes to us in his Word and in his Supper. We can read his Word and be confident that the promises he makes to his people are promises for us, because we have been baptized. We can go to his Table and be confident that we are worthy to take and eat and drink, because we are saints who have been clothed with Christ in baptism.

And we can be ready to meet our Savior when he comes again in glory without any fear of judgment. Baptism is our guarantee that Christ will not judge us harshly as he did those spirits in hell, but instead he will proclaim our eternal salvation, won with his blood and sealed to us in the waters of baptism. Yes, on that Last Day he will complete the outfit he gave you at your baptism, crowning your robes of his righteousness with the crown of life given to all who believe.

At Christmas, in his Word, and at the end of all things you can know that you are ready to meet your Savior. You are prepared because God has made you his own. Baptism has prepared you for the coming of Christ! Amen.

**And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 4:7).