

Apostles Anglican Church

The Second Sunday in Advent

7 December 2025

Fr. Rob Goebel

Main Text:

Supporting Text:

Title: Preparing for the Journey

Collect of the Day:

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and the comfort of your holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, you gave your Apostles grace truly to believe and to preach your word: Grant that we might love what they believed and preach what they taught through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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Introduction

When I was a kid, we lived on an old, non-working farm with 88 acres, the majority of which was wooded. During the summers and whenever we could, my brother and I were outside exploring.

In addition to being outside most of the time, my family did a lot of camping across the United States, and I was part of a Boy Scout kinda group that camped and did other outdoor activities regularly.

As a result, I developed a love of the outdoors. But somewhere between getting married and having kids, I stopped spending a lot of time in the outdoors.

So, when we moved to Tennessee, I decided that this was a great opportunity to get back outside.

One of my favorite things to do outdoors is backcountry camping. Backcountry camping differs from car camping in that you have to carry whatever you need into the wilderness; you can't simply go back to your car and grab something.

This requires a great deal of planning and preparation, and if you don't do it well, there can be a lot of pain and discomfort.

So, you get the right backpack; not too heavy but sturdy enough for all the things you need to bring along.

And you carefully consider each item, literally weighing it down to the ounce.

And you plan where you will get water, where you will camp, what food you will bring,

and of course, the most important question of all, how will you make coffee?

Before you take even one step, your journey is made or ruined in your preparation, or the lack thereof.

Just like this time of preparation, Advent calls us to prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas and His second coming, when He will usher in the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Transition

Today, we will consider three things we must do to prepare for Christ this Christmas and His coming in Glory.

Point #1 – Repent

In our reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew, John the Baptist is calling people to prepare for Christ's public ministry and for His inauguration of the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

You would think this would be joyful news after all the years of waiting and watching for the coming messiah.

But John doesn't say "Rejoice, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

He says, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

You see, the Jewish people John is addressing here are living in exile. They were exiled because of their sin, and they remain in exile because of their sin.

They were exiled because of idolatry.

And in this period between the Testaments, they traded their idols for a new form of idolatry: a spirit of exclusiveness and a striving for legal holiness.¹

We see examples of this spirit of exclusiveness throughout the Gospels.

In Christ's exchange with the scribes and the Pharisees in John chapter 8, they boast, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone."

They seem to have forgotten about Egypt and the many exiles their forefathers have endured.

But, clearly, they have a lot of pride in being the offspring of Abraham and the Children of the Promise.

They had come to believe God's promise of salvation was just for them. They had forgotten that God's promise to Abraham was not just that he would be a great

¹ Henry E. Dosker, "Between the Testaments," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr et al. (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 458.

nation and have a great name, but that in his “. . . offspring shall all the nations of the earth [would] be blessed.”²

Yes, God said he would bless Abraham and bring salvation through Him and Israel, but God is pretty clear here that he intends to use Israel as his tool to bring His salvation to the whole world.

Part of God’s blessing was the gift of bringing the messiah to the world. It was never His intention for them to hold all of God’s goodness exclusively for themselves, but this is what they’ve come to believe. And, this belief became an idol to them.

They placed their trust in heredity rather than in the Holy One of Israel.

They also came to believe that if they followed the law of Moses perfectly, their redemption would be secure.

The Psalms tell us, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul, and so it is, and so it does.”³ But in seeking to obey the Law perfectly, the religious leadership of Christ’s day lost the spirit of the Law.

The Law was intended to help God’s people live harmoniously with God and others. But when the Law of God is reduced to a list of items one has to navigate in order to earn the love of God, the relationship with God and man is reduced to a transaction. And a relationship that is transactional never thrives and rarely survives.

They didn’t start with bad intentions, but in an effort to keep people from breaking the Law, the Pharisees of Jesus’ time added hundreds and hundreds of additional laws or rules around the law.

Think of it this way: if God said to them, “don’t touch this tree,” they would put up a fence to keep people from touching the tree. That’s well and good, but they put up hundreds of fences and told people, “God said not to touch the fences.”

² Genesis 22:1breakingJesus’8

³ Psalm 19:Don’t ,,7

In trying to protect people from breaking the law, they drove people further and further away from God's law and, in doing so, further and further away from God himself.

In the end, they came to believe that if they could just obey the letter of the law perfectly, their redemption would be secure. They placed their trust in their own efforts.

They've placed the surety of their redemption within themselves and elevated performance and perfectionism over faith and trust in the promises of the Almighty.

So, John the Baptist says, "Repent" of trusting in your heritage as Abraham's Sons, and return to trusting in the one who formed Abraham in his mother's womb.

"Repent" of trusting in your ability to keep God's Law perfectly, and turn to the one who gave you the law.

John tells them to repent because he knows this is where they must start in their preparation for the coming of Christ and His Kingdom.

And his words are for us as well as we prepare for the coming of Christ at Christmas and the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven in all its glory.

We must ask ourselves if we harbor pride in our position as Christians and look down on those who aren't like us; those who don't worship in the same way we do or practice their faith as we do.

We have to consider what motivates us to keep God's commandments and our spiritual practices. Are we doing these things to try to earn a love that can never be earned? Or are we doing these good things out of an abundance of love for the one who loved us first and best?

These aren't the only things we need to repent of, but there's not enough time to enumerate all of them. So, I will turn this over to you.

But, let me give you some guidance.

First, remember that repentance is intended to set you free from the burden of your wrongdoing. It should bring freedom and not condemnation.

Second, remember that you are not alone. Come to confession. A priest is available to walk through repentance with you. If you came to Anglicanism from a faith tradition that doesn't have the sacrament of confession, this might feel awkward or foreign to you. That was me when I first encountered confession.

But here's the thing, sometimes the things we need to confess are too big for us to bear alone.

Sometimes we just can't shake the burden of our wrongdoing. So, we need to confess it to a priest, and we need to hear a physical voice, / a voice that is an official representative of the Church, say "Your sins are forgiven."

Transition

Repentance is the first thing we must do to prepare for the coming of Christ. The second thing we need to prepare is to have Hope.

Point #2 – Hope

We need hope. Real hope. We need hope that is anchored in reality, not simply a wish and a prayer.

My hope from a young age was that one day the Cleveland Browns would win a Super Bowl / or even just GET to one!

That's not real hope. Real hope, Christian hope, is anchored in the person and work of Jesus Christ and Hope in the coming of His Kingdom in all its glory.

Unlike the Cleveland Browns the work of Christ is already done. Christ has accomplished everything necessary for our redemption. And he has inaugurated the Kingdom of Heaven.

We need hope because the weight of the world's problems can begin to close in around us.

Years ago, I worked with a ministry for mountain bikers and those interested in mountain biking. Part of what we did was teach people how to mountain bike.

One of the things we told those in training was “focus on where you want to go; focus on the trail in front of you.

Don't look at the sheer drop off beside you, don't look at the hazard on the path.

We told them this because as people we instinctively move towards what we focus on.

When we focus too much on the difficulties and tragedies of this world they began to blind us to the Hope we have in Christ.

When we refuse to give up those things that so easily weigh us down they take hold of our minds, hearts, and souls.

Dwelling on our own brokenness too much is a clever trick of the enemy. It feels so spiritually right and proper.

It starts with a good instinct: self examination, but it leads to a hyperfocus on oneself.

You can tell if you've fallen into this trap because the enemy of your soul won't call you to lay your burden down and he'll never call you to turn your eyes upon Jesus.

When we keep our eyes on the world's problems and our foibles, it's nearly impossible to see Jesus or to have the hope of the world to come.

Conversely, when our focus is on Christ and on our great Hope our vision begins to clear and we begin to see the Kingdom of Heaven bursting through the broken places in the world and in us.

Transition

With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his Kingdom and our burdens and brokenness confessed and laid down we need only one more thing: Endurance.

Point #3 – Endure

When I'm preparing for a trip and someone is coming to pick me up, I don't wait until they get there to do a load of laundry and start packing.

I get everything packed the night before and lay out what I will wear on my trip. In the morning, I get dressed and tie up the loose ends.

About 10 minutes before the time I'm being picked up I say my goodbyes, put my backpack on and I go stand at the end of the driveway. I'm fully ready.

This is the position we must take in Advent. Not at the end of my driveway, but fully ready because the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand.

This is a difficult place to be. The Kingdom of Heaven is here but not yet in its fullness.

We still wrestle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. We still live in a world filled with violence, broken relationships, and tragedy.

The only way we can endure this waiting, this time between, is by confessing our sins so they will be dealt with and set aside.

And by keeping our eyes fixed on our Hope in Jesus Christ and his Kingdom.

Amen.