

Sunday, December 13
Preparing the Way I Part Two
Luke 3v1-18

Connect:

Advent is a time when we Prepare the Way in our hearts for the arrival of the Messiah. It is alive with a sense of restoration and stirring with the hope of redemption. It is heavy with the longing for God to rescue us and bring us back to himself. In our culture, the Christmas season is often associated with a fast paced sense of hurry. The holiday rush, they call it. Inevitably, we will feel the tension of impatient shoppers and hectic schedules. But the Christian embrace of Advent is a counter-cultural act of intentional patience. We wait. We hope. Resisting the urge to rush ahead to the manger, we enter into the story of Israel and share their longing for a Savior.

- Have you ever had to wait for something you desired deeply? How did you handle that? How was the situation resolved? Was it worth the wait?
- Why do you think it is important to embrace Advent and not just skip ahead to Christmas Day?

Engage:

- Read Isaiah 40:3-5 and then cf. with Luke 3:1-6. What is Luke telling us about the identity of Jesus?
- How, specifically, does John 'pave the way' for the Lord? What do verses 4-6 tell us about how the Messiah, the king, is to be received?
- Read Luke 3v7-18. 1. What observations, thoughts or reflections do you have on the sermon or the text?

*"When God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man's god-forsakenness... God does not become a religion, so that man participates in him by corresponding religious thoughts and feelings. God does not become a law, so that man participates in him through obedience to a law. God does not become an ideal, so that man achieves community with him through constant striving. He humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and the godforsaken can experience communion with him." — Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God**

Apply I To treat Jesus as a King means:

- A. Relying. (Not like Abraham. He made Isaac an idol, something he had to have along with God to be happy.) The evaluation question: "Is there something instead of

God I am relying on for self-worth?” Symptom: insecurity (people-approval as an idol), “drivenness” (success or achievement as an idol), self-indulgence (comfort as an idol).

- B. Obeying. (Not like Jonah. He thought that if he did what God had said that it would ruin things.) The evaluation question: “Am I willing to obey whatever God says about this life-area?” Symptom: guilt and “covering up”.
- C. Relaxing. (Not like the Pharisees. They thought they could earn God’s approval through their moral effort or spiritual pedigree) The evaluation question: “Am I trusting in what I have done or am I trusting in what God has done for me in Christ?” Symptom: worry, fatigue, self-pity, or pride.
- D. Expecting. (Not like Moses. When called to do a great deed, he was sure he was not competent.) The evaluation question: “Are there problems or limitations in my life I think are too big for God to remove?” Symptom: boredom and discouragement.
- A fifth, overall evaluation question: If you ever say, “I’ll obey Christ if…” then you are still on the throne of your life, determining when and whether you will take a course of action. Are there any if’s in your life?

Life Evaluation:

- On the basis of the evaluation questions, choose one or two areas of your life that you most need to acknowledge Christ’s Lordship more deeply. (Make a list of “life areas” and ask the five questions to yourself. OR, look for the presence of “symptoms” and track down sins (disobedience), worry/bitterness (dis-acceptance), idols (lack of reliance), or discouragements (lack of expectance).
- What can you do to give Christ the Lordship in these areas? Make a brief plan for each which may consist of the following elements: 1) Repentance, 2) Prayer program, 3) Attitude/thought change, 4) Behavior change, 5) Accountability

Prayer:

O come, O come Emmanuel within these fragile vessels here to dwell. O Child conceived by heaven’s power give us thy strength: it is the hour.

O come, O come, thou Lord of might, whose birth came hastily at night, born in a stable, in blood and pain this infant king who comes to reign.

O come, thou Day-spring from on high: We see the signs that mark the sky. We hear the beat of angels’ wings, let us join the shepherds and the kings.

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel, God’s Son, God’s Self, With us to dwell.

- Adapted from a poem by Madeline L’Engle