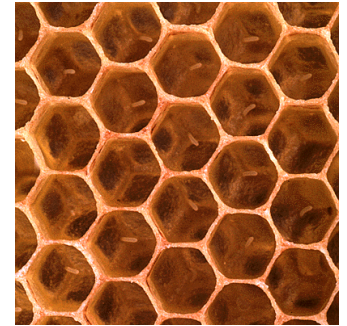


**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS**  
**Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz**  
**Advent 3 December 14, 2009 Mark 1:1-8**



The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" – "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

William Sydney Porter was born when the American Civil War was almost a year and a half old. William's mom died when he was only 3 years old. She died from what they called consumption back then – tuberculosis. When William was 19 he became a licensed pharmacist – and in his spare time – drew pictures of his customers! William moved to Texas – because of his chronic cough – where he worked as a shepherd then a banker – but he wasn't very good at. Eventually he was arrested – accused of embezzlement. He didn't have much of a defense – so he was found guilty and sentenced to 5 years in prison. Because he was a pharmacist – he worked in the prison infirmary. There he wrote literally hundreds of short stories – like Gift of the Magi – people who sold their most precious possession – in order to give a gift of profound love. The best part of William's stories – written under the pen name O. Henry – was his surprise endings. The endings became so famous – still today – if a story or book or movie has a very clever little twist at the end people call it an O. Henry ending! Our Heavenly Father doesn't want us to be surprised. He doesn't want us to be caught off guard. That's why our Heavenly Father sent Elijah – that is John the Baptist – in the spirit of Elijah – to prepare the hearts of God's people to welcome the Lord Jesus. Today – as we continue to prepare to celebrate Christmas

**Prepare Your Heart For The Lord!**

**1. Repent**

**2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit**

Four hundred years before baby Jesus was born the prophet Malachi wrote down how God's people grumbled and complained. God's Word says, **You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask. By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"** *Malachi 2:17* Life isn't fair! Did you know that? Life isn't fair. I heard the other day – there is a town in Texas – where – if you get a ticket – like for speeding. I don't know – what's a speeding ticket these days? \$167 for going down the hill of Boughton Street not pumping the brakes – going 35 instead of 25 mph? Well – in this Texas town – somebody decided instead of paying the ticket – you can just donate a stuffed animal to give to a poor child – and they will call it even! Really! I donate a little Beanie Baby and I'm off the hook? That's not how God's justice works. Adam and

Eve took a bite of spiritually poisoned fruit – and Jesus paid with his life! Sin is never ever a small thing with God. The wages of sin is death – is not a bumper sticker idea with the Almighty. Jesus paid with his life – to take away all our sins. That was God’s plan from before Creation. Imagine that. At just the right time – God’s plan of eternal rescue was put into action. God’s Word says:

**And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** John pointed to the Lamb of God – who would take away the sins of the world! In just about 2 months from Christmas – it will be Ash Wednesday – the start of Lent. A couple of days ago – we got a mailing from the Publishing House – the Synod Lenten Series. There are suggested sermon texts and themes. This year with Jesus’ permission we will have as our theme: ***Father, Forgive Them!*** We will see the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane – forgive our fearful lack of trust! If we had been there – would we have stayed awake – watching and praying so we don’t fall into temptation? Or do we often come to Church – and sit in the comfort of a warm Church – and a padded pew – and we are weary from all our labors – and so we fall asleep? Father forgive our desire to defy your divine authority. How sad when the Sanhedrin – the leaders of the organized Church – instead of sharing the Gospel – hold a kangaroo court – to accuse the Son of God of blasphemy – so they can have him put to death! Father forgive us – when we like the mob in Pilate’s court – in gross and inexcusable ignorance scream – give us Barabbas. And this Carpenter from Nazareth – this gentle Rabbi – **crucify him! Crucify him!** Forgive us when we become so cynical we say, **“What is truth?”** When we despair of the truth of inspired and inerrant Scripture – by simply ignoring Scripture! Forgive us for despising our Savior’s claim to be a King – by weaving our own crown of thorns and pressing it on his forehead – by our careless cursing and swearing. By all the times we have picked on and bullied those we could bully – thinking we were oh, so clever when we were only thoughtless and cruel! Forgive us all the times we felt sorry for Jesus’ physical hurt and pain – while remaining oblivious to the pain in his heart and soul on account of our sins. Forgive us through Holy Communion – the bread and wine that are Jesus’ body and blood. Before you know it – we will celebrate Jesus’ triumphant rising from the dead. The Pointsettias and the Christmas tree will be replaced by Easter lilies. The Easter Gospel will ease hearts that ache and tears that streak our cheeks – because we are adopted children of God and heirs of Heaven!

**John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist...**

Around Christmas time – there are lots of ads to buy clothes for Christmas presents. I have always been intrigued by the idea of an Armani suit – a very fine tailored suit. So I looked it up. You can buy a very nice charcoal suit – three button – jacket fully lined, trousers lined in the front to the knees – slightly tapered waist and slightly tapered legs – for \$1,825 – almost \$2,000. The good news is – they are having a 36% off sale! They also sell white shirts – for \$256. A nice Jerry Garcia tie – \$65 and a pair of Bruno Magli dress shoes just \$655 a pair! If you had a suit like that – how nice would you look on the outside? Pretty sweet – I’m sure! But the problem with people isn’t on the outside. If it was – it would be easily fixed! The problem is on the inside – inside my heart and yours. That’s where it’s really mixed up and messed up. And what are we to do? Only Jesus can forgive the wretched filthy blood fouled rags of our best efforts. Again and again we do the right things – for all the wrong reasons. We do what we are supposed to do – because we fear if we don’t God will squish us like the ugly little bugs we are. A terrible little crack sound – as he squashes us under foot. To be good because we are scared – is hardly a loving Godly motivation. And again and again – deep in our minds and hearts – we ponder what it would feel like to be incredibly bad. What it would be like to poke somebody in the eye

with a sharp stick. And then when we read in the newspaper about somebody who does – we think – what a terrible person they are. Where oh where is their self control? We are dirty rotten – with the Grinch’s heart – several sizes too small. The Christ child came in lowliness to live the life we couldn’t – then to die on the cross – to wash away all our sins. He died so that we would be free from the crushing burden of guilt. That we would be heirs of Heaven!

**After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.** Wearing sandals is something I used to do when I was in college. It was customary to wear sandals that had like tire treads on the bottom – and Velcro straps on the top. You could slip them on and go slap, slap, slap outside. It was kind of like bare foot – except – you could walk on hot blacktop or prickery dry grass and it didn’t hurt the bottom of your feet. The down side of sandals obviously was your feet got dusty and dirty. If they were sweaty – the dust and dirt would stick between your toes. If you didn’t have naturally very nice toenails – it was very quickly very disgusting. At the end of the day – when you would take off your sandals – you really needed to wash your feet. It was not false humility – when John the Baptist said he didn’t deserve to stoop down and untie Jesus’ sandals. Who was he – a person born in the filth of sin – to bend down and touch the leather strap that held on Jesus’ sandals? Who was he – to presume – to touch the holy Son of God? When we did the live Nativity – it was part of the shepherd part – to come and kneel at the manger. It made you think – as you knelt down – how we don’t do that very often. We don’t kneel. We don’t bow. Ladies don’t curtsy. We are Americans. We threw off our King. We don’t want our President – the most powerful man on the planet – to get too puffed up – to act like he’s better than we are – to act like a King. And so we show him respect – but sometimes, not so much! I was thinking – bowing at the manger – if we really were shepherds – and in that feed box was the Son of God – I think maybe we would not get so close. And maybe we would not just bow our head. Maybe we would just bend way down – our face in the dust and straw! And maybe we would stay that way – for a while – trying to understand how of all the people in the whole wide world – in the thousands of years of history – why we should be among the very first – to see Immanuel – God with us!

**I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.** John baptized – washed people with water of repentance – for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus would come to wash us with the Holy Spirit and power. Jesus came to fill our hearts with faith in his forgiving love. And that makes all the difference in the world. There is terrible sickness in Africa in the nation of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is just south of Zambia and Malawi. People are sick with cholera! Most people don’t know much about cholera – because nobody knows anyone with cholera – do you? When you get cholera – you dehydrate – to the point that you die. Health officials say there are no less than 16,000 people with cholera in Zimbabwe. They say there could soon be more than 60,000 people with cholera. That of the 12 million people who live in Zimbabwe – half of them are at risk. In just one family the 5 youngest children have all died! One of those little children was named Clopas! Do you know what that means? It sounds to me – like that family knew about Jesus. Don’t you think? I would have great hope that that family knew about Jesus because Clopas was whom? Clopas was one of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus – that first Easter night. Clopas was one of the men who walked along that road – with the risen Christ. Clopas was one of the men whose heart was set on fire – when Jesus opened the Scriptures to him. Clopas was one of the men who went all the way back from Emmaus to Jerusalem – to tell the rest of Jesus’ disciples that he had seen the risen Christ – had recognized him – when he broke the bread! What did he see? The nail marks in Jesus’ hands? The forever engraving of Jesus’ forgiving love? John baptized with water. Jesus

baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and the power of the Gospel! Jesus is the one who prepares our hearts for us. Jesus is the one who prepares our hearts to welcome him again this Christmas time! Amen!

To God alone all glory!

*Rev. Anthony E. Scheller*