

Sermon Text: Luke 3:1 – 6
Sermon Theme: Take Time to Listen to the Message of Advent
1. It is Spoken by the Lord's Messengers
2. It is Spoken to Offer Comfort

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracónitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.' "

We hear it as we walk around the stores at this time of year. We hear it playing as we go to our favorite restaurant. And if your home is anything like ours, it is playing there as well. At this time of year many of us enjoy listening to our favorite Christmas songs and hymns. Some have suggested that we should sing more Christmas songs in our weekend worship services throughout the weeks leading up to our celebration of Christmas. But so far in my ministry, I have been hesitant to give in to that suggestion. I am not doing it because I don't like Christmas. In fact, I really like the fact that 10 minutes or so before each of our mid-week Advent services, we have that time where we sing some of our favorite Christmas hymns and songs. But, I resist including a lot of Christmas songs during our Worship Services because I don't want to see us as a congregation miss out on the wonderful message of Advent. Advent is a time for us to prepare ourselves; to prepare our hearts for the celebration of our Savior's birth; to prepare our hearts for the Great Last Day when Jesus Christ will return again. So today, as we gather together for our worship, let's resist the temptation to jump ahead to Christmas, and keep focused on the season of Advent. As we gather together around the Word of our God, we will Take Time to Listen to the Message of Advent! It is a message spoken by the LORD's messengers. It is a message spoken to offer comfort.

You know as well as I do, that there are many doubters of the Bible. They deny the Bible's teachings such as God creating the world in six days; or that Jesus, God's one and only Son, came to this earth, and that as true God and true Man he won forgiveness of all sins. The Holy Spirit knew that there would be people who would not believe that a messenger by the name of John the Baptist was born to prepare the way for Jesus' coming as the Promised Messiah. So he led the Gospel writer Luke to give great detail of when John's ministry began. Even the Jewish Historian, Josephus, writing around 95 A. D. recognized that a man by the name of John the Baptist lived at the time of Jesus. Josephus gives his opinion on why John the Baptist was put to death when he wrote it was because Herod, "feared John's teachings could lead to unrest." Because the Bible tells us, and not because a Jewish historian backs up the fact, you and I know that John the Baptist came as the Lord's messenger.

What other names come to mind for you when you think of messengers of the Lord? Perhaps we think of the Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah. Maybe you thought of Jonah, who at first didn't want to be the Lord's messenger, but then later did go and proclaim a message from the Lord to the people living in Nineveh. As we think of messengers of God's Word found in the New Testament maybe we think of the Lord's Apostles, such as Peter and Paul and others who were messengers sent by the Lord to share his Word with others. And today the Lord wants to use you and me as his messengers. But, as messengers of the Lord there are times when we act like Jonah, and try to run away from the Lord so we don't have to be his messenger. We think that it is someone else's job to share God's Word with people. But to refuse to be one the Lord's messengers is really to disobey God. It is a sin. It is a sin that makes you and me just as guilty as the serial-killer on death row. But, the Good News for you and me is that it is a sin that Jesus Christ came to suffer and die for, just as he did for the sins of the whole world. Pray that the Lord

would forgive you for those times when you refused to be his messenger or gave into peer pressure and failed to be his messenger. As you humbly confess this and all your sins, let the Good News of the forgiveness of all of your sins fill your heart with peace and comfort. Ask that the Holy Spirit to make you eager to live a life that brings all praise and glory to the Lord who saved you. As Peter writes in his second letter, "What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God...dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." It is only through Jesus Christ our one and only Savior that you and I are spotless, blameless and at peace with our God. Because of Jesus, God the Holy Spirit empowers you and me with a willingness to go out and share the message of his Word; the message of Jesus' birth; the message that Jesus is coming again as the King of kings and Lord of lords. My dear fellow messengers of God's Word: Take time to listen to the message of Advent! Give thanks that you have been entrusted to serve as a messenger of our Savior-God.

A young child wakes up during the middle of the night crying because of a bad dream. So a parent holds the child in their arms and offers words of comfort. Someone close to us suffers a loss through the death of a loved one, and we go to that person to offer words of comfort. As you and I take time to listen to the message of the Advent season, and are filled with a desire to share that message with others, the Lord uses you and me as his messengers to speak his word of comfort.

The Gospel writer Luke tells us that the Lord's messenger, John the Baptist, spoke a message of comfort to the people of his day. We are told that John "went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." This was a direct fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah wrote some 700 years earlier when he was led by God the Holy Spirit to describe John as "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.'" Rather than eternal punishment for sins, the promised Messiah would come as the world's one and only Savior. What words of comfort for John himself to hear! What words of comfort he was able to share with others!

What words of comfort for you and me to hear! What comfort is ours knowing that "every valley" in our lives, that is every short-coming, every sin, has been filled in by the blood of Jesus. What comfort is ours that the mountain pile of your sins and mine has been leveled by the perfect sacrifice of God's one and only Son! What comfort is ours knowing that because of Jesus all of our crooked, wicked ways are all forgiven as we come before the throne of our Savior-God in humble repentance. What comfort is yours and mine as we open the pages of the Bible and in Jesus Christ you and I "see God's salvation" with our own eyes. As one author has written, "Every sinner longs for the announcement that he or she is free from the bondage of sin and death. Because Jesus has come, we are released from death. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are no longer locked in the dungeon of eternal death because of God's wrath and anticipating an eternity of punishment in hell...this is not because we have achieved release by our own efforts or because we have done our time and satisfied the Law. Our bondage is over because our loving Father in heaven achieved our release through his Son, the promised Savior." Through our Savior, the comfort you and I have to enjoy is the forgiveness of all of our sins and the promise of eternal life at his side in heaven. As Paul writes in Romans, chapter 5, "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." What words of comfort for you and me to hear for ourselves! What words of comfort you and I are able to share with others!

In just a few short weeks, we will celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Leading up to the celebration of our Savior's birth, we enjoy hearing and singing the songs and hymns of Christmas. But, during these days before Christmas, may all of us take time to listen to the message of Advent. As you listen for yourself, as you are filled with joy because of your own forgiveness and the promise of eternal life in heaven, remember that the message of Advent is spoken by you, the Lord's messengers. Ask for the Lord's blessings as you share his Word. Be a willing messenger of the Lord as you offer a message of comfort to others; comfort that can only come through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.