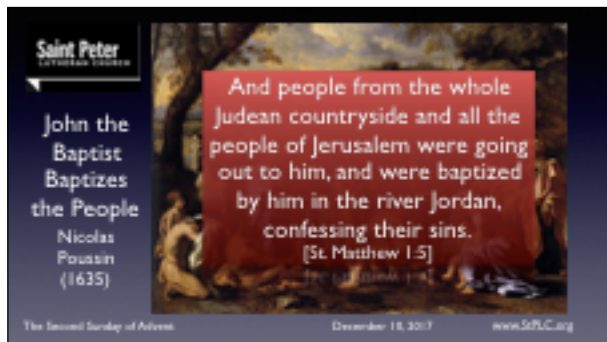




Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Welcome to the middle of Advent. This week and next week, as is our annual practice, we'll be spending time with St. John, the Baptizer. We'll hear from St. Mark today, and then turn our attention to the Gospel According to St. John next week.

The Baptizer is a central figure at the beginning of the Gospel story. The account of his baptism of Jesus in the Jordan is the first story included by all four Gospel writers. And at the heart of John's ministry is his baptismal practice. He would convince his listeners of their sinfulness, invite them to repent of their sins, and then in a dramatic and symbolic ritual they would go together into the Jordan River. He would thrust them down under the water, putting to death their sinfulness, and raise them up to new life.



John's ministry was powerful, and Mark reports that people from all over the countryside were flocking to him, and being inspired by his ministry. In fact: the evidence seems to suggest that some years later, even after the resurrection of Jesus, there were still people whose primary focus was on John's teaching and ministry.



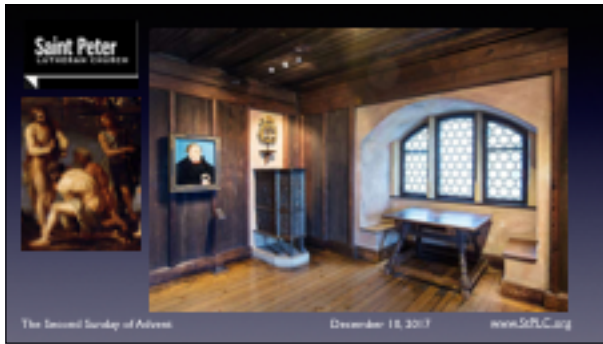
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I'm always grateful to have time with this story every Advent because baptism is particularly important to those of us who are Lutherans. This sacrament played a prominent role in Martin Luther's faith life, and in his relationship with God. Luther took comfort in God's promises — and baptism was a tangible, concrete way that those promises became real for him. Luther was very much a man of his times, and spoke of having significant encounters with the Devil — the Tempter.



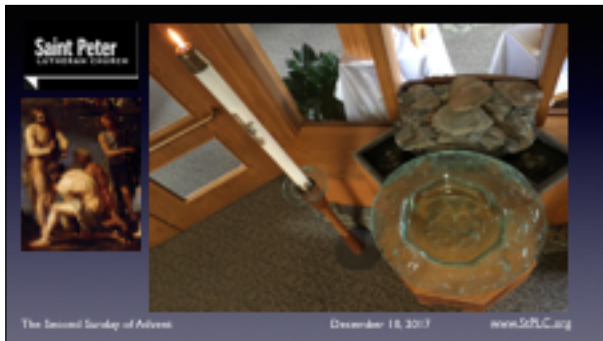
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This is his study at the Wartburg Castle, where he translated the New Testament into the German language in 1521 and 1522. He would spend hours at his desk, pouring over the scriptures, making it possible for the German people to read the Bible in their own language. It is said that there once was a smudge on the wall across from his desk. As the story goes, now and again he would see a vision of the Devil, standing in front of him and tempting him to turn away from this important work. He is said to have once picked up his inkwell and threw it at the Devil with all of his might, hitting the wall and leaving a huge ink stain. It is a story that speaks to Luther's awareness of temptation, and how hard he worked to resist it.



5

There is another story about Luther, set at the Black Cloister in Wittenberg where he lived. Here, too, he used to study and write late into the night, often sensing a powerful and tangible temptation from the Devil to turn away from his work. Luther claimed to have written, in chalk, on the surface of his desk, “Baptismus Sum” —“I am baptized.” Faced with temptations, his response was, “I am baptized, Satan, and there is nothing you can do about that!” The promise of Baptism held great power for Luther. It reminded him that his relationship with God was secure not because of what he had accomplished — his believing or behaving — but because his relationship with God was grounded in the promise of his baptism. The promise that God loved him just as he was, and had welcomed him into the fullness of the eternal promise.




6

During the season of Advent, we regularly join Luther in exploring how Baptism can be powerful and meaningful for us as well. We too understand that it is through baptism that God welcomes us into this family of faith. That is why our baptistry is located at the main entrance to this worship area. Every Sunday you pass through these baptismal waters, as you come into this assembly to offer your prayers and praise to God, and to receive the blessing of God through word and sacrament. The relationship God begins with us in baptism is the source of our comfort and hope. It is the assurance that we have received God’s promise of eternity. It is what invites us to walk through life unafraid of death, and able to live fully into the calling we have as children of God.

7

**Saint Peter**  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

**Preparation, Repentance, Forgiveness**



As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.  
[St. Mark 1:2-4]


The Second Sunday of Advent  
December 18, 2017  
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But there is a difference between the practice of St. John, the Baptizer, and the experience which inspired Martin Luther Remember: John's role is to prepare the people for Jesus. Grounded in the message of the Hebrew Prophets, especially Isaiah and Malachi, John understood himself as the fulfillment of the ancient promise that God would send someone to prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah.

8

**Saint Peter**  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

**Preparation, Repentance, Forgiveness**



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[St. Mark 1:2-4]

The Second Sunday of Advent  
December 18, 2017  
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How did he do this? Through "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." John emphasized the importance of repentance, as a way of preparing for Christ. He understood that without knowing the extent of our sin, we could never truly know our need for a redeemer. That's why his message was so fiery — we'll talk about this more next week. Today we are mindful that the purpose of John's ministry is to prepare believers to be touched by the redeemer we know as Christ Jesus. Through John's message, and his focus on repentance, God continues to prepare people to experience Christ today.

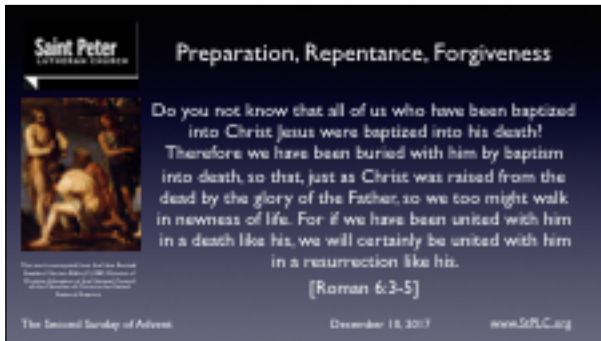
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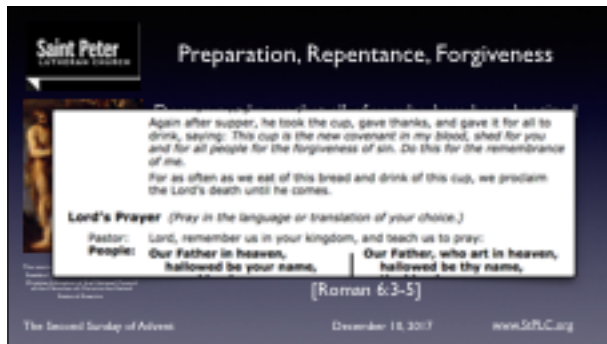
The preparation, though, is distinct from the actual experience. This was important for Martin Luther — it is important for us as well. In Luther’s time, confession and absolution were central to the Christian life. In fact, he even toyed with making this the third sacrament in our tradition. It is what leads us to discover our need for forgiveness.

But it is not what gives us hope and joy. In fact, it does the opposite. The more thoroughly and honestly we confess our sin, the more aware we are that there is no way for us to completely live into the vision God has for our lives. We always come up short. So if awareness of sin was the only result of confession — of repentance — it would be a sad and hopeless journey for us.

10



The Apostle Paul helps us to understand this in a deeper way. Paul teaches that Christian Baptism is not a sign of our intent to confess more honestly, or live more faithfully, or believe more confidently. It is, instead, a sign of the promise of Christ, who endured death in order that he might redeem our deaths, and who experienced new life, in order that he might gift us with the same.

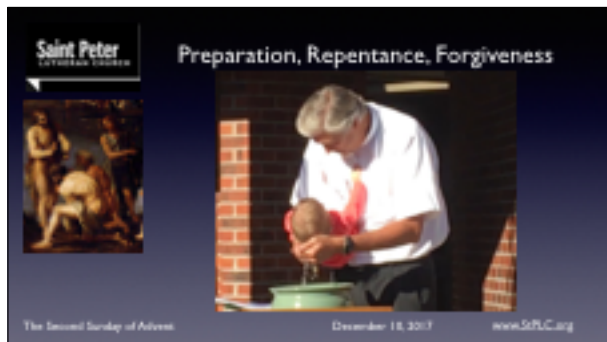


11

We often remember these words during the Eucharist, don't we?  
 "For as often as we eat of this bread and drink of this cup, we  
 proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Or as the Apostle says it:

"We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that,  
 just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the  
 Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."



12

That's why we, as Lutherans, love to baptize infants whenever  
 we can — it reminds us that baptism isn't a sign of what we have  
 done, as believers, to make ourselves available to God's grace.  
 Instead, it is a sign of what God has done, in order to grace us  
 with the gift of life which we can neither earn or deserve, but  
 which God delights in extending to each of us.

And so every Advent we begin our church year by remembering  
 John, the Baptizer, and the gift our baptism is to us: assuring us  
 throughout our lives of God's great love for us, and deep desire  
 to give us this gift of new life.

**Saint Peter**  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

## Take It Home!

Let's keep the conversation going. Our hosts will have a 7-day devotional guide for you as you leave today.

Question for this evening's conversation: "How does John the Baptizer prepare the people to receive Jesus into their lives?"

The Second Sunday of Advent      December 10, 2017      www.SPLC.org

13

This would be a good week to talk some about baptism in our homes.

As you leave today, our hosts have a 7-day devotional for you. Let's spend the next couple of days reflecting on this morning, and preparing ourselves for next Sunday.

Our discussion question for this afternoon or this evening is, "How does John the Baptizer prepare the people to receive Jesus into their lives?"

**Saint Peter**  
LUTHERAN CHURCH

## The Last Word

In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit. By the baptism of his own death and resurrection your beloved Son has set us free from the bondage to sin and death, and has opened the way to the joy and freedom of everlasting life.

[Thanksgiving: ELW Service of Baptism]

The Second Sunday of Advent      December 10, 2017      www.SPLC.org


14

Today we'll give the last word to our baptismal service. Just before the water is poured and the baptismal promise is spoken, we join together in this Thanksgiving:

In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit. By the baptism of his own death and resurrection your beloved Son has set us free from the bondage to sin and death, and has opened the way to the joy and freedom of everlasting life.

15

**Saint Peter**  
PATRIARCH LUCIFER



**The Last Word**

He made water a sign of the kingdom and of cleansing and rebirth. In obedience to his command, we make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the (†) Son, and of the Holy Spirit.


[Thanksgiving: ELW Service of Baptism]

The Second Sunday of Advent      December 10, 2017      www.SPLC.org

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16

**Saint Peter**  
PATRIARCH LUCIFER



**The Last Word**

Pour out your Holy Spirit, so that [those who are] baptized may be given new life. Wash away the sin of all those who are cleansed by this water and bring them forth as inheritors of your glorious kingdom.

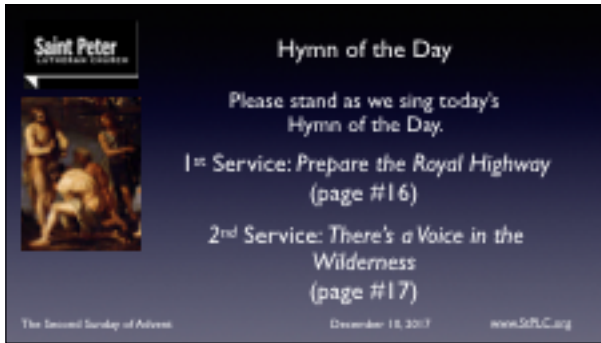
[Thanksgiving: ELW Service of Baptism]

The Second Sunday of Advent      December 10, 2017      www.SPLC.org

Pour out your Holy Spirit, so that [those who are] baptized may be given new life. Wash away the sin of all those who are cleansed by this water and bring them forth as inheritors of your glorious kingdom.  
This Advent, let's give thanks for John's ministry, and God's gift of baptism.



17



Slide 17: Hymn of the Day. The slide features a dark blue background with a small image of a religious scene on the left. The text is centered and reads: "Hymn of the Day", "Please stand as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.", "1<sup>st</sup> Service: Prepare the Royal Highway (page #16)", and "2<sup>nd</sup> Service: There's a Voice in the Wilderness (page #17)". At the bottom, it says "The Second Sunday of Advent", "December 10, 2017", and "www.SPLC.org".

Please stand with us as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.

1st Service: Prepare the Royal Highway  
(page #16)

2nd Service: There's a Voice in the Wilderness  
(page #17)

18



Slide 18: St. Mark 1:1-8 (slide 1 of 2). The slide features a dark blue background with a small image of a religious scene on the left. The text is centered and reads: "St. Mark 1:1-8 (slide 1 of 2)", "1<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight;'" 4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.", "The Second Sunday of Advent", "December 10, 2017", and "www.SPLC.org".

1.1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,' " 4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

**Saint Peter**  
CATHOLIC LITURGY

**St. Mark 1:1-8 (slide 2 of 2)**

5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Second Sunday of Advent  
December 10, 2017  
www.SPLC.org

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