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GOD RAISES UP CHILDREN FOR ABRAHAM  
Matthew 3:1-12; Advent 2A; December 6-7, 2025

God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord, the Messiah, Christ the King. John preached how to be prepared for the advent of our King: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Repentance is taking responsibility for our sins, both being sorry for them and being willing to turn away from our sins and toward God in faith for our forgiveness. Those who heard and believed God’s Word through John **“were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins,”** trusting that their Savior was close by. Jesus’ advent in the flesh of man had already taken place and He was about to begin His public ministry. John preached that the Lord was near.

We hear John’s preaching in preparation for our Lord’s final advent, Jesus’ coming in glory. John calls us to repent of our sins and be baptized in faith. When our Lord comes again it will be as the Judge of both the living and the dead. What John was doing was different from what Jesus would do. **“I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”**

John compared unbelieving and unrepentant people to chaff, the husks around wheat kernels that are removed and burned in fire. This is a warning to those who would face God’s judgment without faith. Christians are compared to the kernel of wheat that the farmer keeps. We hope for Christ’s coming in glory when we have faith. Having repentance and faith is the only way to be prepared to face our Judge.

Hearing these words of warning and promise, we want to be “wheat” from the Lord’s field that will be gathered into His barn of heaven forever and not “chaff,” which He will burn in the unquenchable fire of hell forever. We don’t want to be **trees not bearing good fruit that are chopped down and thrown into the fire**, another of John’s descriptions of people who won’t repent, be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, and live the Christian life as they wait for their Lord’s return. We are to be good trees bearing good fruit.

The call to repentance and faith applies to everyone because all people are sinners. The Ten Commandments show what God demands of us and also reveal that we have not obeyed them; all are sinners, who should be condemned to the fires of hell forever.

If I asked you to recite the Ten Commandments, could you do it by memory? Every Christian should be able to do this without any difficulty. Could you explain what each Commandment requires of you using Luther's explanations in the *Small Catechism*? When you were confirmed, you could, and it was assumed that you would be able to do this for the rest of your life. If you can't, then you should review the commandments and their meanings so you can properly know your sins and repent with sorrow.

Christians believe in God, who has made us His children through Baptism and faith in His Son Jesus Christ. We are sorry for our sins and can turn away from them and toward God who forgives our sins for Jesus' sake. In faith, we bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Fruits are the good works God demanded in His commandments. Jesus summarized God Word of Law this way: **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself"** (Mt. 22:37-39). "Good trees" bear this good fruit of loving God and our neighbor. Faith in God and bearing fruit in keeping with repentance leads to us being "wheat" that will be brought into God's barn.

John the Baptist identified some people in his day who were "chaff" not "wheat," trees not bearing good fruit. **Pharisees and Sadducees [were] coming for baptism. [John] said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."**s They were obeying John's call to be baptized, but they were missing something: repentance for sins. They did not think they were sinners needing saving by God.

How did they show a lack of repentance and faith? They were relying on Abraham as their father, assuming they were among the saved because of their Jewish heritage, not by faith in God's Christ.

We aren't Jews, children of Abraham, so is this even an issue for us today? We are like the Pharisees and Sadducees if we rely on church membership status rather than repentance of our sins and faith in Jesus. Tracing our genealogies back on the church roster does not save us. I have heard people justifying themselves before God by saying things like: "My parents and grandparents were members of this church. I was baptized and confirmed here; I had my children baptized and confirmed," but they won't come to church now. Understand this: the faith of our ancestors does not save us. Baptism without repentance and faith does not save us.

If we are looking in ourselves for something we think makes us worthy of God's kingdom, we can only find that we are lost in our sin. Looking into our hearts and at our lives can only reveal our sin and a lack of faith that needs to be repented. If we trust in being the children of our earthly parents to be saved, we are not the children of God, but the children of the devil, a **brood of vipers**.

God's Word to us through John the Baptist is, "**Repent... and be baptized, confessing your sins... Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,'**" That's God's Word of Law, a threat of what He will carry out when judgment day comes. Where is the Gospel, the Good News? John goes on: "**I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.**"

Abraham and Sarah were as dead as a rock in old age and childless, yet God was able to raise up a son of promise for them, Isaac. Abraham had faith that God would give him a son and make him into a great nation, and through him bless all people through his Seed, Jesus, the promised Savior. God finds us dead in our trespasses and sins and raises us up to live as His children. God makes us His children by baptism into the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus. We are children of Abraham when we share Abraham's faith in the same God who makes the dead alive.

Faith in God is a living and active thing; faith does stuff; faith produces good works. Only a living tree can produce fruit. We have life when we are connected to Jesus by faith. Jesus taught: **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned”** (John 14:4-6).

John preached repentance and baptism on the threshold of Jesus' first advent. Today we hear his preaching as we wait for Jesus' final advent when He will come in glory. God has raised up children for Abraham from stones; we are children of the promise, like Isaac (Rom. 9:6-8). Our faith in Jesus will produce the fruits of repentance and good works. God has made us into trees bearing good fruit and wheat that will be gathered into His barn in heaven when Jesus comes in glory.

We are God's children now, but we are still children of our parents and sinners on the way to death. That makes each day one to repent of our sins and strive to live by faith, producing the fruit of good works. For us to be prepared for our Lord's coming, we must repent daily of our sins and trust in God's saving baptism into Christ's death and resurrection that forgives our sins and raises us to life. Amen.