

The title for today's message is: **The Advent Voice of John**

John said: **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

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

The phone rings. You pick it up and say "Hello" and you hear somebody say, "Hey! How are you doing?"

Instantly you know exactly who it is and you begin chatting away the time. How did you know who it was? You recognized their voice!

There are certain people whose voice we know so well that as soon as we hear their voice on the phone.

hearing their voice cheering on a sports team, or even hear their voice in a crowded room we know exactly who it is because we recognize their voice.

But in order for us to get to the point where we can recognize someone simply by hearing their voice, at least one of two things needs to occur.

Either there needs to be something unique about their voice or we need to be very familiar with that person.

Today, my friends, as you and I continue to prepare our hearts and our lives during this Advent season.

We once again come into contact with the voice of someone who is uniquely associated with this particular season of the year.

Its none other than John the Baptizer. This morning I would like us to study these familiar words of Matthew chapter 3 by contemplating the theme:

Listen now, to the Advent voice of John: ***Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near and produce fruit in keeping with repentance.***

John the Baptizer is perhaps one of the best-known characters in Bible history.

We know him as the babe who leaped in his mother's womb when Mary came to visit.

We know him as the forerunner of Christ whom God set aside to prepare the way for Jesus' coming.

But most of all we remember John because of the message that he preached in the desert of Judea. ***"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."***

If ever there were a message and a messenger clearly identifiable with each other, it is John the Baptizer and the call to repentance.

There were, of course, a number of things that set John apart from the other religious leaders of his day and age.

Scripture describes him as, a man whose "clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist.

His food was locusts and wild honey." But the voice of John ringing out in the desert, calling people to repent of their sins is by far the most striking.

John's title was the Baptizer but first and foremost he was a prophet of God. And as a prophet he came to God's people proclaiming God's word.

Telling the people to prepare for the advent of the messiah. His message – Repent!

The message to repent had become a familiar theme for God's people. Throughout their history the children of Israel had led lives that required God to send one of his prophets to call his people to repentance.

In the days of the Judges, the people would sin against God. God would call the people to repentance.

By allowing them to be oppressed and when they cried out to him for deliverance, he would send a deliverer to rescue them.

At this time in salvation history God was again calling his people to repentance.

Yes, they had fallen away from God again! Their worship life had become one of half-hearted devotion.

Performing the required sacrifices, saying the right things, and giving the outward appearance that they were righteous and upright.

They were trusting in their ability to keep God's commandments and in their good works to enter the kingdom of heaven.

But their hearts and minds were far from God, yet people went out to John from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

Confessing their sins, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. Now today and every day God has also sent John to call us to repentance.

And as the people of Israel worshiped God half-heartedly, we also find ourselves guilty of the same sin.

Whenever we come to God's house and pay no attention to his word and treat worshiping him like it is work instead of a privilege we need to repent.

Whenever we think that our salvation is provided by church membership rather than trusting that Jesus has paid the price for our salvation, we need to repent.

Look, in the Bible the word, “repent” means, "To change one’s mind." Because genuine repentance involves a change of mind.

It involves a change of heart and it involves a complete change of direction in our lives.

My friends, our sinful nature renders us completely incapable of effecting this change in ourselves and on our own.

True genuine repentance is something that must be worked in us by the power of our God.

Only the Holy Spirit is able to effect this kind of change in our hearts and in our minds and in our lives.

The people through the preaching of God’s holy Law had been brought to recognize the seriousness of their sins and through the power of the Holy Spirit they were led to confess their sins.

These individuals were baptized “with water for repentance.” As the Holy Spirit led people to John as he proclaimed the word of God.

So also has the Spirit led us to God by the preaching of his word. In our baptism the Holy Spirit has washed all our sins away.

And also created saving faith in our hearts; created faith that trusts in God and his promises, and created faith in the fact that God has done everything for our salvation.

He promised to send the messiah who would save the world from their sins. He kept that promise by sending Jesus to be our substitute, and to receive the punishment for our sins.

Because Jesus lived that perfect life God requires and suffered an innocent death for our sins, so God no longer holds us accountable.

As we celebrate the advent season, we praise God for two things. First, for Jesus' first advent.

We are reminded that God has indeed blessed us by sending his one and only Son to this world to save us from our sins.

Secondly we are reminded to listen to the advent voice of John as he reminds us of Jesus Second Advent when he comes to judge the world.

As we wait for Jesus to return John the Baptizer tells us to repent of our sins because the kingdom of God is near.

But John also tells us that after we repent we are to produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

May God graciously grant that we will indeed listen, truly listen to the Advent voice of John.

Amen

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.