

Repentance

Scripture Reading — Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” — Matthew 3:1-2

Christmas has become a “cozy” holiday. Christmastime in many people’s minds conjures up images of a plush room with a shimmering Christmas tree and colorful packages underneath, a crackling fire, eggnog, and Christmas carols playing in the background.

In contrast, very few people think of John the Baptist. There’s nothing cozy about John, with his coarse camel-skin outfit and his diet of honey and locusts. Yet people came in droves from all around the Jordan River to hear John’s thunderous preaching.

John’s message couldn’t be further from cozy. John pounded so hard that people were reminded of the seriousness of sin and God’s wrath against it. “Repent and believe!” he called out.

Yet John’s message is not all fire and warning. There is hopefulness here too, for he is preparing the way for the Savior. One of the symbols the church uses for John is a clam or scallop shell. It is said that he used a shell to pour the water of baptism. For John, baptism is a sign and seal of our repentance and forgiveness, of our belonging to the Messiah.

So have a wonderful Christmas with family and friends. But don’t get too cozy. Remember and reflect on the great need our Savior has come to fill.

Prayer

Jesus, cleanse us from all our sins; forgive us and make us new again. May we celebrate Christmas with joy, knowing our hope is in you. Amen.

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