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Mark 1:1-8<sup>1</sup>  
John the Baptizer  
prepares the way for the Christ  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent  
Supplementary Lectionary Series "B"  
Gospels

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Grace WELS Durand MI  
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Elders' meeting  
Sunday School Rehearsal

<sup>1:1</sup> The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup> It is written in Isaiah the Prophet:

“Behold! I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way” (Malachi 3:1) —

<sup>3</sup> “a voice of one calling in the desert,  
‘Prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight paths for him’” (Isaiah 40:3).

<sup>4</sup> And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> And this was his Message: “After me One more powerful than I is coming, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I myself baptize you with water, but he himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

JOHN THE BAPTIZER PREPARES THE WAY FOR JESUS  
I. ACCORDING TO OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY  
II. CALLING FOR REPENTANCE  
III. POINTING AHEAD TO THE MORE POWERFUL ONE

In the Name of Jesus, to whom John the Baptizer points as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

When the Angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah that he would be the father of John the Baptizer, he said that John would be ...

**<sup>14</sup> ... a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great in the sight of the LORD.... he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. <sup>16</sup> Many of the people of**

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

***Israel will he bring back to the LORD their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go on before the LORD, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the LORD”*** (Luke 1:14-17)

John would be the forerunner of our LORD – Jesus Christ. John was to prepare the hearts of the people for Jesus’ coming. Then, when Jesus did appear to begin his three-year earthly public ministry, John the Baptizer pointed to Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29b,36b). It was in this way that John the Baptizer prepared people for Jesus’ coming. JOHN THE BAPTIZER PREPARES THE WAY FOR JESUS ... I. ACCORDING TO OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY; II. CALLING FOR REPENTANCE; and, III. POINTING AHEAD TO THE MORE POWERFUL ONE.

#### JOHN THE BAPTIZER PREPARES THE WAY FOR JESUS I. ACCORDING TO OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

Mark’s Gospel first quotes the Old Testament Prophet Malachi, who said, “Behold! I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” (1:2b; cf. Malachi 3:1). The entire verse, to which Mark was referring, states,

***<sup>3:1</sup> “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his Temple; the Messenger of the Covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty*** (Malachi 3:1)

It is clear that this messenger, John the Baptizer, was preparing the people for the coming of the LORD himself, for it is the LORD Almighty who says that “my messenger ... will prepare the way before me.” Malachi and John the Baptizer point to the Messiah Jesus as true LORD God, for Mark refers to Jesus as “the Son of God” (1:1b). Mark then quotes the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah.

Mark quotes Isaiah who said, “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way of the LORD, make straight paths for him’” (Mark 1:3; cf. Isaiah 40:3). We take note of three things in Isaiah’s proclamation. First, the ministry of the forerunner was of preaching – he was calling out. Second, this ministry was taking place in the desert. John the Baptizer’s work took place southeast of Jerusalem, along the Jordan River as it emptied into the Dead Sea. This was desert area. In addition, figuratively speaking, John’s ministry called to people who were in the dry and dead desert of their sinfulness, headed for hell. Third, and finally, John the Baptizer’s ministry was preparing the way of the LORD, making straight paths for him. The opposite of straight is crooked, and crooked is one of the ways in which wickedness is described. John was calling for people to prepare for the LORD’s coming by repenting – making straight paths to their hearts for the LORD.

John was preparing people for the coming of the LORD Jesus by calling them to repentance. Mark states in our text, “And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (1:4). True repentance for sins was the first step in receiving the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins would be obtained only through this “Coming One,” Jesus, of whom John the Baptizer was forerunner. So, we see that Old Testament Prophecies concerning the forerunner of Jesus pointed to the work of John the Baptizer, the forerunner of Jesus. Of course, there were other Old Testament Prophecies that pointed toward Jesus’ coming.

In the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve had fallen into sin, God promised to send the seed of the woman, a descendant of the woman, to crush the head of Satan (cf. Genesis 3:15). Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy. The Old Testament Prophet Micah proclaimed that the Messiah, Jesus, would be born in Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:2). The Prophet Balaam, though unwillingly, proclaimed that a star and Ruler would come out of Jacob (cf. Numbers 24:17). Jesus is that Ruler; and, it was a star that led the Magi or Wisemen to worship the baby LORD Jesus. Isaiah Chapter 53 spoke of this Messiah as the Suffering Servant upon whom would be laid the sins of the world. Isaiah also spoke of the resurrection from the dead of this Messiah. The Psalms spoke not only about Jesus’ suffering and death but also about Jesus’ ascension into heaven (cf. Psalms 22; 68:18). The Psalms also spoke about Jesus ruling and reigning forever as well as judging (cf. Psalm 2). Along with Malachi and Isaiah who pointed to the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptizer, other Old Testament Prophecies pointed to Jesus’ coming into the world and to his work of redemption – of taking away the sins of the world.

#### APPROPRIATION

In one of his confrontations with the Jews, Jesus said, “These Scriptures testify about me” (cf. John 5:39). The basic message of the Old Testament is: “Jesus is coming.” The basic message of the New Testament is: “Jesus has come.” The New Testament proclaims that Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament Prophecies. The fact that these Prophecies pointed to the forgiveness of sins in Jesus and that Jesus would earn this forgiveness by his suffering and death on the cross – these Prophecies and their fulfillment are that upon which we are to grasp, hold, believe and depend.

Hold on to these Prophecies – promised in the Old Testament Scriptures and fulfilled in the New Testament Scriptures. Jesus exhorts you to do this when he says, “If you continue in my Word, then you really are my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (cf. John 8:31,32). The freedom that you have as you continue in God’s Word is freedom from sin and its result, which is death – eternal death. The problem is that by nature you do not want to continue in Jesus’ Word.

Even now, as you are trying to listen to this sermon from God’s Word, your sinful mind is attempting to lead you in a different direction – to think about something else. St. Paul characterized your problem in these Words: “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7). In other words, your sinful mind, your sinful heart, refuses to listen to what God says in his Word. Moreover, since you do not by nature want to continue in Jesus’ Word, then also you lose the freedom from sin

promised in his Word, and you have only eternal death waiting for you. But the Holy Spirit works through Jesus' Word, in order to create in your heart faith in Jesus as your Savior; and, by that faith, you now desire to continue in Jesus' Word.

Jesus' Word in truth and purity, grants to you the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. Hold to that Word in truth and purity. As you do that, you will also be brought to repentance.

## JOHN THE BAPTIZER PREPARES THE WAY FOR JESUS II. CALLING FOR REPENTANCE

Mark records, "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (1:4). The Greek term for repentance is *metanoia* [metanoia] and literally means a change of mind. But repentance is more than just a change of mind or change of thinking or a change in the way of thinking. Repentance includes a change of heart, a change of behavior, a change of life, a change of lifestyle. Repentance includes viewing all sinfulness, every departure from God's Word, with repugnance, disgust and disdain. Repentance includes putting sin out of one's life and thinking and speech and attitude and behavior. The people coming out to John the Baptizer were doing this.

Mark states, "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to [John the Baptizer]. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River" (1:5). The people thronging out to John, publically confessed their sins! This public confession of sin was not hypocritical or shallow. This confession of sin was heartfelt and sincere and genuine. And, through John's baptism, they received the forgiveness of their sins. This repentance and confession of sin, however, could not take place on the basis of one's own will or choosing.

No person can manufacture true repentance for sin. The reason for that is, as you heard before, "the sinful mind is hostile to God." The sinful mind, heart and will, is opposed to God. True repentance and the resulting sincere confession of sin, comes from outside oneself. True repentance and the resulting sincere confession of sin, is only worked in the heart of a person by God's Word. Similarly, forgiveness of sin is grasped only when the Holy Spirit works faith in the heart of a person. The LORD made this clear through his Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel, when he said,

***<sup>25</sup> I [the Sovereign LORD God] will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:25-27).***

Notice that the LORD God does not say that the individual person will do these things. Rather, the LORD says, “I will do these things”: Cleanse a person from sin; put a new heart in a person; put his Spirit in a person. The LORD God gives a person a clean heart – the forgiveness of sins. The LORD God cleanses a person from his or her sins. The LORD God gives a person a new heart – repentance and faith in Jesus. The LORD God moves a person to live a new lifestyle that puts away sin from their lives. St. Paul stated this truth when he said, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:11,12). God’s grace comes to a person through the Means of Grace: The Gospel – the Good News of Jesus.

It is through the Means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacraments – that a person is brought to faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. We see this at work in John the Baptizer’s baptism, for John was “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (1:4b). We also see this in John himself, for his own lifestyle reflected this repentance and faith.

“John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey” (1:6). John did not indulge in the comforts and excesses of the flesh. His life mirrored repentance. Moreover, John placed his confidence, reliance and faith in the One more powerful than John, whose sandals John was unworthy to untie (cf. 1:7). John preached repentance and faith in this Coming One – this Messiah. John himself lived in this repentance and faith in this Coming One – this Messiah, Christ Jesus.

#### APPROPRIATION

You too are called to repentance and faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Just as John the Baptizers’ baptism was for “repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” so also your baptism washes away your sins. St. Paul testifies in his Epistle to the Ephesians that you have been made “holy,” cleansed “by the washing with water through the Word” (Ephesians 5:26). In Chapter Six of First Corinthians, after the Apostle Paul has listed numerous sins of which the Corinthians were guilty, he said, “And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the LORD Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11). St. Paul wrote to Titus that

***<sup>4</sup> ... God our Savior ... <sup>5</sup> saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4b-7).***

Through Holy Baptism – the Gospel in the water – your sins have been washed away. But this blessing is lost to you if you do not continue in repentance.

Recall again that repentance is a change of mind, a change of heart, which leads to a change of life and lifestyle. It is lip-service if you say, “I repent”; but then you go on doing and saying and thinking, the same things again and again and again. Repentance means killing, putting to death, the desires and habits of the flesh and sinful person – the Old Adam. This is a hard thing, “for we daily sin much and surely deserving nothing but punishment.”<sup>2</sup> There is an on-going battle between your sinful nature and the New Creature that God has created in you through the Gospel of Jesus. Concerning this struggle, St. Paul cries out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). Neither you, nor I nor St. Paul was up to winning this struggle with sin. But, St. Paul gives the answer to which you and I must cling: “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our LORD!” (Romans 7:25a).

Through Jesus, we are brought daily to repentance. Through Jesus, we are brought daily to the foot of the cross. Through Jesus, we are given the power to change our minds, attitudes, life and lifestyle. Jesus is the more powerful One than you or I or John the Baptizer. Thus,

### JOHN THE BAPTIZER PREPARES THE WAY FOR JESUS III. POINTING AHEAD TO THE MORE POWERFUL ONE

John the Baptizer is pointing ahead to Jesus when he says,

**<sup>7</sup> ... “After me One more powerful than I is coming, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup> I myself baptize you with water, but he himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (1:7,8).**

Jesus is the One more powerful than John, for Jesus is eternal and everlasting. The writer to the Hebrews states that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). The writer to the Hebrews also states concerning Jesus, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands” (Hebrews 1:10). St. Paul wrote to the Colossians, “by [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Colossians 1:16). Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, created all things. Certainly, this creation of all things is an indication of Jesus’ power – omnipotence – Jesus is, indeed, more powerful than John. John comments that he is not even worthy even to undo Jesus’ sandals. But, at the same time, John was pointing ahead to this more powerful One, who not only created all things but who would also take away the sins of the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Kuske, David P. Luther’s Catechism – The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition for Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English (Milwaukee Wisconsin, Northwestern Publishing House, 1998), p. 8.

John pointed ahead to Jesus. John was preparing the people for the appearance of Jesus – for Jesus' earthly public ministry. John was preparing the people to understand that Jesus' death on the cross took away their sins, for John speaks of Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29b,36b).

### APPROPRIATION

Jesus is the One more powerful than you or me. Recall our daily struggle against sin – a struggle which too often we lose. Jesus never lost that struggle. Jesus successfully resisted and overcame temptation, for Jesus "has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15b). This pure and sinless Jesus was made "to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The righteousness that God demands of us, Jesus supplies. The punishment that you and I deserve, is laid upon Jesus (cf. Isaiah 53:6). The forgiveness of sins that we have through Jesus, is our motivation for living daily in repentance.

Through Jesus' power, we are motivated to live in daily repentance and faith in him as our Savior. St. Paul wrote in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians,

***<sup>14</sup> ... Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).***

No longer are we to live for ourselves, pursuing the desires of our sinful nature. Rather, Christ's love, which revealed itself on the cross, compels us to live our lives in repentance and faith in Jesus, our crucified and risen Savior.

### CONCLUSION

John the Baptizer was the forerunner of Jesus. Through his Message, John continues to prepare our hearts today for Jesus' coming – his Second Coming in Judgment. John calls us to live in repentance for our sins, faith in Jesus as our Savior, and to bring forth the fruits of faith and repentance in our daily lives. Amen.