

**+ Luke 3:1-6 + Prepare for the Big Arrival! + Second Sunday in Advent + 6 December 2009 +**

When you head back home today, I bet you'll see them. They won't be in all their glory, but you'll know they're there. As soon as the sun goes down, they turn on and light the way down your street. Maybe you've put them up already. Maybe you've thought about putting them up already. In all likelihood, your neighbors have been putting them up already. If you haven't noticed, Christmas lights and Christmas decorations are going up all over. I think the nice weather lately has helped, because it certainly seems there are more homes decorated this year than in the past couple years, but why does everyone put so much effort into so much preparation?

Are they getting ready for family to visit? Are they trying to impress you, their neighbor? Are they just doing what they do every year at this time of year? Are they preparing for the arrival of a special guest? Do they realize why they're preparing so much? As you put up the tree and hang the lights with care, what are you preparing for? A big arrival? More importantly, have you prepared your spiritual home—your heart—for the Big Arrival?

This Advent season we've been receiving encouragement from God's Word to **get ready for the Big Arrival** of our Savior Jesus—the upcoming celebration of his first arrival at Christmas, the ways he arrives right now through Word and Sacraments, and his Big Arrival on the Last Day. Last week, we were urged to watch for the Big Arrival, but today, the Lord sends John the Baptizer to urge you to **PREPARE FOR THE BIG ARRIVAL!**

A husband and wife find out they're going to be parents. They have nine months before the big arrival of their son or daughter, so what do they do? They use those nine months to prepare a place in their home for that child. They choose the room and transform it into a nursery. Sometimes it needs a lot of work. It might take cleaning and some paint, some curtains and pictures. They furnish it with a crib and changing table and dresser. They get toys and clothes and diapers and everything else to prepare for the big arrival that's going to change their lives. In a similar way, as you see Christ's Big Arrival coming soon, you **prepare for a big change** too.

Before that can happen, though, you need to realize your spiritual "home" needs a big clean-up. In verses 4-5, John the Baptizer quotes Isaiah, who describes our hearts as a messy area that needs to be cleaned up. ***"Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth."***

Now take a look at your spiritual "home." Your heart used to be in terrible shape. The piles of guilt overflowed out the windows and doors. The filth of sin thickly covered every word and action. The rot of unbelief guaranteed the ruin of the house. If anyone could've looked at your spiritual "home", they would've said, "It's impossible to clean up this filth. There's no way it's going to be ready for the Big Arrival. It would be better to condemn this home and tear it down."

Through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism, however, the Holy Spirit came in and cleaned up the place. He flushed out those piles of guilt. He scrubbed down your words and actions with the cleansing solution of Christ's blood and made you shine like new with the white paint of Christ's holiness. He removed the rotten parts of your spiritual "home" and replaced them with the strong beams of faith, while placing your home on the new, firm foundation of Jesus Christ. With all that, the Spirit changed your life.

...But take another look. Are you still prepared? Do you notice the filth of sin beginning to cover your actions again and the piles of guilt growing back? Maybe with the stress that comes with the holidays, your fuse is shorter than usual and you lash out at your family or friends for little things. Maybe you're more ready to argue with mom or dad or your spouse because you don't get your way. Maybe you haven't let go of a comment or action that offended you, so you still harbor hard feelings towards that person. You refuse to talk to them about it. Maybe your pride leads you to ignore those you step on as you try to push through your way at work or church. Because of sin, you and I are a mess, and the Big Arrival is coming soon!

...But fear not! There is a solution! That amazing solution is better than any made-for-TV cleaning solvent. That solution is so powerful it can fill valleys, level off mountains, straighten out crooked roads, and smooth out rough roads. That solution is so amazing it makes scarlet sins as white as snow. That solution, of course, is our Savior Jesus.

Jesus is the only way you can be prepared for his Big Arrival. Jesus came to this world, so your spiritual "home" wouldn't be condemned. He lived a life of perfect obedience and kept his spiritual "home" perfectly clean, because yours was so woefully unprepared. He sacrificed himself to make your heart as white as snow

through the gift of his forgiveness. He took all of your sins and like the trash they are, he threw them out forever. Through faith, Jesus changes your life to prepare you for his Big Arrival.

Whether preparing for the arrival of a baby or a special guest, you prepare with their arrival in mind. Because Jesus prepares you for his Big Arrival, you can **prepare with his Big Arrival in sight**. It's a crazy time of year made even crazier by overloaded schedules, end-of-the-year activities, and annual responsibilities. It's terribly easy to lose sight of why we even bother to prepare this Advent season. It's terribly easy to lose sight of the real reason you're preparing all the decorations and gifts and music and recitations. For a moment, stop wondering what's next on your checklist or your busy schedule this week. Stop and focus on the arrival of your special Guest, a special Guest who came as a lowly, little baby, a baby who came to bring you peace and salvation, a baby who grew up in lowliness and humility to suffer and die to prepare heaven for your big arrival, a Guest who promises to come back once again to bring you there. Focus on him and take time to prepare with the Big Arrival of that special Guest in sight.

With the first Big Arrival of that special Guest in sight, God sent John the Baptizer to ***“prepare the way for the Lord.”*** In the ancient Near East, it was common for a ruler to send a herald ahead of him so the people could clear the roadway of obstacles, like rocks and potholes. That's what John was sent to do. He was sent to prepare the way through the hearts of the people by preaching a ***“baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”***

So how do you prepare the way for the Lord? When you know guests are coming, you try to make the house look as clean and presentable as possible. You pick up the piles, clean the dirty laundry, and toss out the trash. You clean the floors and bathrooms, and straighten everything up. With Christ's Big Arrival in sight, you prepare for his coming with repentance – confessing your sins and trusting in his forgiveness for those sins.

Through his forgiveness, Jesus removes the obstacles of your sinfulness so you can prepare for his Big Arrival. He alone levels off the mountains of your pride by giving you a spirit of humility. He alone smoothes out the rough roads between you and one who has offended you as Christ gives you the boldness to engage the issue and offer forgiveness. He alone straightens out the crooked road of your attitude so your focus is on his way, not yours. He alone fills the valley of your impatience with his patient understanding.

By faith in Jesus, you can prepare with his Big Arrival in sight, not with an extra measure of Christmas spirit or hope for peace on earth, but by putting aside the obstacles of your pride and impatience, by paving over the rough roads of your hard feelings with his forgiveness. You prepare by focusing your attitude and your actions on Jesus, who prepared for his first Big Arrival with you and your salvation in sight.

In verse 6, the Baptizer quotes Isaiah, ***“And all mankind will see God's salvation.”*** God had a lot of preparation to before that first Big Arrival. Not only did the Lord have to guide all of human history to lead up to it, but he also had to put up with the awful effects of sin throughout his creation with millions of mortal enemies born each day. He had to preserve the line of the Savior in the midst of a nation of people that rebelled in spite of his special attention. Still he prepared so ***“all mankind will see God's salvation.”***

God's preparations were not in vain. ***“When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”*** The Word became flesh. Christ obeyed God's Law perfectly for us. He suffered the punishment we deserved, so ***“all mankind will see God's salvation.”***

Listen to the voice of the Baptizer and prepare for Christ's Big Arrival. A new church year has begun. You have another opportunity to see God's salvation, to see what he did for you in the manger and on the cross and in the empty tomb. Through the Supper, he prepares your heart with the strength and forgiveness you so desperately need. Through the Word, he reminds you that the love, that prepared everything to bring him here to save you, is now preparing a heavenly home for you. One day that love will bring him here again to take you home to heaven eternally.

Are you prepared? You might have to prepare for some big arrivals the closer you get to Christmas, but God-willing, by faith, you're now preparing for the biggest arrival of them all—the arrival of Christ Jesus. He changes your life and his Big Arrival is always in sight. That Big Arrival of your heavenly Guest is coming soon, so then, with his help, prepare! Amen.