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Our gospel lesson today comes from the third chapter of Matthew. The first two chapters are about the birth and the early years of Jesus' life. This third chapter is the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Actually, the second chapter closes with Jesus as a young child and the third chapter opens with Jesus at thirty years old.

During this lapse of time, Jesus was the oldest son and he was helping to raise the family. This was a formative time of life and he was learning the stresses and labors of the common people. Jesus was fulfilling the duties of an eldest son. He was to find out what it was like to be a working man, what it was like to earn a living, to save, to buy food, clothing and some pleasures. To meet customers of his carpenter trade, some happy and some dissatisfied, or some wouldn't pay. He was not born into a protected, cushioned life. He came into a life that we all have to live in. It was necessary for him to understand life as ordinary people live. Jesus became the village craftsman of Nazareth. He was fulfilling his duties to his own family and home.

It is presumed by many that Joseph was older than Mary when they married and was probably dead by the time Jesus did his first miracle. There is no mention of Joseph in any of the gospels after Jesus had grown up. Jesus had to see that his brothers and sisters were raised before he could go to his calling by the world.

In the third chapter, now we throw in the prophet John the Baptist. John was like the voice of God. He even dressed like the prophet Elijah: Clothing of camel's hair and a leather belt. It had been 400 years since they had had a prophet. John came with a message from God. He came out of the desert after many years of preparation by God; he leapt into the arena, full-grown and fully armed.

He fearlessly denounced evil wherever he found it. When Herod the king sinned with an evil and unlawful marriage, John rebuked him. When the Sadducees and Pharisees were struck with ritualistic **forms**, John never hesitated to tell them so.

John was like a light, and he lit up the dark places. John not only rebuked all evil, but he was a positive in erecting the moral standards of God. He would summon people to what they ought to do. He would challenge them to be what they could be.

It was not himself that he wished people to see; he wished to prepare them for the one who was to come. John always pointed beyond himself. In the book of the prophet Malachi, we hear God's promise:

*Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.*

It was a Jewish belief that before the Messiah came that Elijah would return. As I said before, John even dressed like Elijah. Camel's hair clothing and a leather belt.

Matthew connected John with the prophecy of Isaiah. A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare a way for the Lord, make straight the wilderness, a highway for our God. John was making a way for the lord. He was preparing the people for when Jesus was to come.

Preachers and teachers with prophetic voice point not to themselves, but to God. The people recognized John as a prophet even after years of no prophetic voice, because John was a light to light up evil things. A voice to summon people to righteousness. And he was pointing them to God.

John had the authority that comes from being in the presence of God. John was telling them, "I baptize you with water, that you may repent. He who is coming after me is stronger than I. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." John was looking ahead to God.

John baptized the Pharisees and the Sadducees and listened to their confessions. But he would not let them rest on their status in the community or their past or their ancestry. As with Pharisees and the Sadducees, our fate depends upon what we choose to do and what we are doing and what we are becoming.

Advent gives us the chance for repentance and to shape our lives for John's calling to us and the coming of the Messiah. John's coming into our lives could be compared to the terrorists who flew into the twin towers of New York. As they stirred up our feelings and caused us to evaluate our way of life, the same way John stirs up our lives.

We cannot listen to John calling us to look for the injustice, the inequities, the prejudice, ignorance, the poverty, the hunger, as he asks us to repent and do not part in turning this troubled world around.

I would like to ask for your prayers this afternoon and this evening. As we have said before, the Aryan nation and the Church of Jesus Christ Christian are scheduled to have a meeting this evening at the **McClellan Arts Center**. Please pray that they will not be able to establish a church and their beliefs in our community. We support diversity.

Romans, in our lesson today, states it best: "May God grant us to live in harmony with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus so that together we may, with one voice, glorify God our lord Jesus Christ."

In Washington DC, the Washington monument sets a standard for the capitol. No building can be taller than the monument. And on top of the monument, on the cap, are two words: Laus Deo, Latin for "Praise be to God". *[sic]*

I would like to now read to you George Washington's prayer for the United States:

*Almighty God we make our earnest prayer that thou wilt keep the United States in thy holy protection. That thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow citizen of the United States at large... and finally that thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplication we beseech thee. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.[sic]*

He could see the problems coming to this country the same as we have today. Let us keep this prayer of George Washington in mind when we pray for our community and the people living in it. That discrimination will not be our demise. Peace will be our goal.

Amen.