

Prepared for Christ?

✧ Read the prophets' writings. (vv.1-3)

✧ Heed the prophet's call. (vv.5-8)

In the Name of Jesus the coming Christ of God, dear preparing Christians:

Are you ready? Everyone is asking these days. Grownups seem as stressed as students. My freshman year in high school I was preparing for my first semester tests with one eye. The other eye couldn't see very well because a teammate knocked out my lens in a basketball practice. Every semester season thereafter didn't seem so bad. Are you a little more mellow over the years to realize, "Everything will get done that needs to get done"? Maybe you even have loved ones telling you that. The Loved One of our souls is saying it right now, "All the other things will get done just fine. But if you miss this one, you lose everything." You see, my friends, everyone is so worried about Christmas even if they won't call it "Christmas"! One of our favorite restaurants said in it's menu, "The reason for the season is steak!" Great! Do they want to let everyone be lost as long as they're not hungry? Prepared for Christmas? The real question is, are you **Prepared for Christ?** You will be if you...

✧ Read the prophets' writings. (vv.1-3)

The shortest of the four Gospel accounts is this one by Mark. He does not often point us to the ancient Jewish prophets because Mark wrote mostly for Gentile Romans. The Holy Spirit inspired Mark to use powerful, vivid verbs to describe the Savior of the world more awesome than the entire Roman Empire. But Mark's readers still need to know the credentials of the Lord's **Christ** and what He means for them in time and eternity. So like Matthew, Mark will connect "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*"¹ with the ancient prophets who foretold Him.

This is one of the most important reasons to believe the Bible truly is the Word of God. No other religious book even attempts this. Scholars who claim that religious books are all the same are either grossly ignorant or lying. The key Gospel writer God the Holy Spirit inspired in the Old Testament was Isaiah, 700 years before Christ. All the other prophets pointed to the coming Christ, but none with the vivid pictures we find in Isaiah. In fact, we understand the other prophets better because of Isaiah. So Mark mentions Isaiah (40:3) as his source, but also quotes from the last prophet of the Old Testament era, Malachi (3:1): "*Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare the way for you.*"

Anticipation has always been the perfume of the bride of Christ. Ever since our first parents fell into sin, she was waiting for God to send the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head. Each time another prophet spoke up about the coming Christ, it was like another spray of that fragrance reminding her of her wedding to come. And each of the prophets was helping her prepare by the beautiful wedding dress that God would provide for His bride. When the Groom finally came there would have to be a messenger to announce His arrival. There would be no trudging through mud and snow. The way would have to be clear for the bride to follow Him. But it would not be an easy way on city streets.

The messenger would be "*a voice of one calling out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.'*" There are so many crooked ways through life. As my Granddad said, "There are a million ways to hell, but only one Way to heaven." We can come to God only through His **Christ** who would be anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. He would not only lead the way, but open

¹ W.P. ~ unless otherwise noted translation is the Wartburg Project popular review. [12/03/2014] (<http://wartburgproject.org>)

the way to heaven. Mark quoted Malachi saying, literally, “Behold I will send my messenger before your face....” It is in the face of the Lord’s **Christ** that we can finally see the smiling face of God. The warmth of His smile warms the bride’s heart with eager anticipation for Him to come and take her home. **“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”** (2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV84) **Prepare for Christ**, so that the love of God can come straight to your heart. Nothing under the tree, not even a new car in the garage can come close to the glory of God’s grace smiling on you in Christ.

What would make the people so excited that they would stream out of Jerusalem and walk twenty some miles to the Jordan River wilderness? The journey there was downhill, but they had to climb several thousand feet on dusty roads to get home to their businesses again. And why go out to see such a strange fellow? **“John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness....John was clothed in camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey.”** Did he remind them of Elijah who dressed and ate like that back in Old Testament times? As we **Read the prophets’ writings**, we are now prepared to appreciate the people’s excitement. We too can...

☆ **Heed the prophet’s call. (vv.5-8)**

One main reason for the season was that it had been so long. Imagine if you grew up hearing about Christmas, but never got any presents yourself. Then along comes someone telling you a whole bunch of presents are coming to make up for all those years you missed. It would be more than “sugar plums dancing in wee little heads,” wouldn’t it?

God’s people had been waiting 400 years in silence. After enjoying God’s Word through prophets 1100 years from Moses to Malachi, there had been no messengers with direct revelations from God. Yet those earlier prophets were read in the temple and synagogues every Sabbath. Finally they hear John the Baptist is out there in the desert saying the Messiah, the **Christ**, is coming soon. That alone would get everyone going all the way from Jerusalem to the Jordan.

But there was so much more for them and for us that makes us want to **Heed the prophet’s call**. John the Baptist was really the last Old Testament prophet announcing the coming **Christ**. And the baptism he gave was essentially the same as Christian baptism today. We’ll hear in coming weeks how Jesus Himself and several of His disciples were baptized by John.

If you ever find yourself speaking out of turn, then you can understand why Peter would want John’s baptism. If you sometimes act rashly, striking out in anger, you’ll realize personally why James and John, whom Jesus called “the Sons of Thunder,” would want to see John the Baptist. They came confessing their sins and in John’s baptism received God’s forgiveness of all their sins.

This was not because of John. He confessed honestly, **“One more powerful than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and loosen the strap of his sandals! I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”** That would not mean a more powerful baptism, but certainly a more powerful Baptizer. Jesus the **Christ** of God had divine power as God to pour out the Holy Spirit like a flood on His disciples that first Pentecost. Then they could carry the Good News to the ends of the earth so that all of us can **Heed the prophet’s call** this day too.

You may have tons to get done, but nothing as important as treasuring your own baptism. It is **“the Holy Spirit’s washing of rebirth and renewal which he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”** (Titus 3:5-7 TPA) Bride of **Christ**, prepare to meet Him. He comes this time not to suffer and die, but to take us home to His glorious wedding banquet. Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen.