

***Worship Alive Plus!***

**Second Sunday in Advent**

**Series C**

***Worship Alive Plus!*** Is designed to be adaptable in planning

Contemporary, blended, and “fresh traditional” worship.

readings are the assigned readings for the day taken from the

Revised Common Lectionary @ Concordia Publishing House

The Liturgy and *Sermon Starters & Seasonings* are written by the writers of

Worship Alive Plus! @ WorshipOutlet

**Theme – “Preparing (for) the Way” (Luke 3:1-6)**

Luke chronicles the calling of John the Baptist who preached a baptism of repentance for sins and the good news of salvation. Luke quotes from the Prophet Isaiah that John is the one who is the voice calling from the wilderness and preparing the way for the Lord. He will make the ways straight and smooth. Salvation is at hand.

**✝ We Lift Our Hearts in Worship ✝**

[Preservice options include video countdowns, worship song videos, welcomes), CDs, or live music.]

**Welcome & Time of Greeting**

**Time of Praise and Worship**

**Glorious Day (Living He Loved Me)**

J. Wilbur Chapman, Mark Hall, & Michael Bleecker, © 2009 Word Music, LLC (a div. of Word Music Group, Inc.) My Refuge Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) Sony/ATV Tree Publishing (Admin. by Sony/ATV Songs LLC)

**Jesus Son of God**

Chris Tomlin, Jason Ingram, & Matt Maher, ©2012 Sixsteps Songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) Worship Together Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), A Thousand Generations Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Valley Of Songs Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Sony/ATV Timber Publishing (Admin. by Sony/ATV Sounds LLC), Open Hands Music (Admin. by Sony/ATV Sounds LLC)

**Come Thou Long Expected Jesus**

Charles Wesley, Jacob Sooter, Meredith Andrews, Rowland Hugh Prichard, © 2017 Jacob Sooter Music (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) Not Just Another Song Publishing (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) So Essential Tunes (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) Vertical Church Band Publishing (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) Curb Word Music (Admin. by WC Music Corp.) Mesmerized Music (Admin. by WC Music Corp.)

**[Traditional Options]**

**On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry**

EH 65; ELW 249; LBW 36; LSB 344; LW 14; NCH 115; PH 10; RS 490; WC 136; WAR 156

**Prepare the Royal Highway**

ELW 264; LBW 26; LSB 343;LW 27

**The Advent of Our King**

LBW 22; LSB 331; LW 12

**Invocation**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *The Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.*

**Worshipers**

**In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.*

**Worshipers**

**Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.*

**Worshipers**

**Your ways, God, are holy. What god is as great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *Amen!*

**Worshipers**

**Amen!**

**Opening Prayer / Theme Introduction**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *Heavenly Father, with joy and awe, we praise you for claiming us as your sons and daughters, and for pouring your Holy Spirit upon us. Help us to prepare this earth for your glory, and shine your light on all your faithful children, for the sake of the one whose birth and baptism brought renewal and transformation to this world, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Worshipers**

**Amen!**

**Time of Confession and Forgiveness**

*[Alternate location: following Message]*

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *Lord, we confess.*

**Worshipers**

**We confess that we have forgotten your miracles, your promises. We have trusted in ourselves first.**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *We confess that we do not seek you.*

**Worshipers**

 **We confess that we do not keep our eyes, our hearts, and minds on You Jesus. We confess that we forget that you sit at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us, even now.**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *We confess that our focus is on our earthly circumstances instead of eternity. We confess and repent of our ways Lord, ways that do not include you first in our lives.*

**Worshipers**

**Forgive us Lord for our sins. We pray for Your mercy and grace. It is only by your mercy and grace, Lord that we can repent. Help us Lord to repent.**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *Lord do not forsake us; do not be far from us, our God. Come quickly to help us, our Lord and Savior.*

**Worshipers**

**Amen!**

**✝ We Hear God’s Word ✝**

[Read aloud both the introduction and Scripture]

**First Reading Malachi 3:1-4**

*Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, and it proceeds essentially 400 years of silence- and waiting. The prophet Malachi prophesies of a messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord. Malachi describes the One who will come as a refiner, a purifier. He will put the Israelites on trial and testify against the idolaters and oppressors, the ones who have turned away. But as always, a promise- Return to me and I will return to you.*

“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. **2**But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. **3**He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, **4**and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

**Second Reading Philippians 1:3-11**

*Paul writes to the church at Philippi from prison. And even while in prison, he writes of the joy the Philippians bring to him, because of their faith. He speaks words of encouragement here and throughout the letter. He prays that they will be able to love more, have insight and discernment, bear fruit and ultimately to give glory and praise to God.*

**3**I thank my God every time I remember you. **4**In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy **5**because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, **6**being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. **7**It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. **8**God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. **9**And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, **10**so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **11**filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

**Gospel Luke 3:1-6**

*Luke chronicles the calling of John the Baptist who preached a baptism of repentance for sins and the good news of salvation. Luke quotes from the Prophet Isaiah that John is the one who is the voice calling from the wilderness and preparing the way for the Lord. He will make the ways straight and smooth. Salvation is at hand.*

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— **2**during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3**He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **4**As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.
**5**Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. **6**And all people will see God’s salvation.’”

**Response Songs**

*[Alternate location: following Message]*

**King of Kings**

Brooke Ligertwood, Jason Ingram & Scott Ligertwood, ©2019 Hillsong Music Publishing Australia (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing) Fellow Ships Music (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) So Essential Tunes (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)

**Our God**

Chris Tomlin, Jesse Reeves, Jonas Myrin, & Matt Redman, ©2010 Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) sixsteps Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) Said And Done Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) Vamos Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) SHOUT! Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing) worshiptogether.com songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing)

**Hark! The Herald Angels Sing** with **King of Heaven**

Charles Wesley & Felix Mendelssohn, ©Public Domain

Available on [www.PraiseCharts.com](http://www.praisecharts.com), [www.LifewayWorship.com](http://www.lifewayworship.com), [www.MusicNotes.com](http://www.musicnotes.com)

Jason Ingram & Paul Baloche, ©2010 Integrity Worship Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)) Leadworship Songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)) Sony/ATV Timber Publishing

(Admin. By Sony/ATV Sounds LLC) West Main Music (Admin. by Sony/ATV Sounds LLC) Windsor Hill Music (Admin. by Sony/ATV Sounds LLC)

**[Traditional Options]**

**To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord**

LBW 79; LSB 406/407; LW 223

**Creator of the Stars of Night**

CH 127; EH 60; ELW 245; LSB 351; NCH 111; PH 4; RS 483; UMH 692

**When All The World Was Cursed**

LSB 346; LW 187

**Arise, O Christian People**

LSB 354

**Message Title Preparing (for) the Way**

*“Sermon Seasonings” provided at the end of this service.*

**✝ We Respond to God’s Word ✝**

[Optional location for Confession/Absolution]

**Affirmation of Faith**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—This is true:*

*For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*

**Worshipers**

 **It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death, and destruction—This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.*

**Worshipers**

**It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—**

**This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity, of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.*

**Worshipers**

 **Come, Lord Jesus, Come!**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *Amen!*

**Worshipers**

**Amen!**

*[Alternate Suggestions]*

**We Believe** Matthew Hooper, Richie Fike, & Travis Ryan, © Abundant Life Ministries UK (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)) Integrity Worship Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)) Integrity's Praise! Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)) Travis Ryan Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI))

**This I Believe (The Creed)** *Ben Fielding & Matt Crocker, ©2014 Hillsong Music Publishing (Admin by Capitol CMG Publishing)*

***-OR-***

*Speak the historic* **Apostles’ Creed***or***Nicene Creed**

**Offerings**

*[Choose an unused song from elsewhere in the service, or program Special Music by worship team, choir, or soloist]*

**✝ We Pray ✝**

**Prayers**

*[Worshipers appreciate the sincerity of informal, heartfelt prayer, in a simple prayer language they can use in daily life. These starters are offered to help facilitate spontaneity.]*

**Prayer Topic Starters**

* Gratitude for the Lord’s blessings
* Wisdom in dealing with challenges at work and home
* Offering praise and glory to the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit. . .
* Thanking God for the way He guides and guards each of us daily. . .
* Thanking Him for the forgiveness He so freely offers. . .
* For peace for our world, wars, rumors of wars, armies, civilians. . .
* For wisdom and guidance for our nation, our president, elected officials, local leaders. . .
* For our family units here within our community and congregation. . .
* Requests for healing: relationships; emotional issues; of physical concerns. . .
* For strength to be His hands and feet to a dying world.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

*[Consider singing the Lord’s Prayer on occasion, a capella or with accompaniment]*

**Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

 **For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

*[A Communion option is provided for churches celebrating the Lord’s Supper]*

**✝ We Celebrate the Lord’s Supper ✝**

*Here our Lord gives to us His own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of all our sins.*

**We Prepare**

 *So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.****28****Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.****29****For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.*

**Words of Institution**

 *When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.****15****And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.****16****For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”* ***17****After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you.****18****For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”* ***19****And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”* ***20****In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*

**Music During Communion**

**Manger Throne (w/First Noel)**

Jonathan Smith | Phil Wickham | Tony Wood, © Mike Curb Music; Tony Wood Songs; Be Essential Songs; Cashagamble Jet Music; Phil Wickham Music; Simply Global Songs

**Mary Did You Know?**

Buddy Greene & Mark Lowry, ©1991, 1993 Word Music, LLC (a div. of Word Music Group, Inc.)
Rufus Music (Admin. by Gaither Copyright Management

**Room in My Heart**

Brandon Lake | Nick Herbert | Tim Hughes, © Brandon Lake Music; Maverick City Publishing Worldwide; Capitol CMG Genesis; Safe and Sound Music; Tim Hughes Designee; Bethel Music Publishing; Integrity Music

**[Traditional Options]**

**Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People**

BH 75 77; CHH 122; EH 67; ELW 256; LBW 29; LSB 347; LW 28; NCH 101; PH 3; RS 488; WC 132; WAR 155

**The Day is Surely Drawing Near**

LBW 321; LSB 508; LW 462

**I Heard The Voice Of Jesus Say**

BH91 551; EH 692; ELW 332,611; HWC 414; HFG 51; HLC 309; LBW 497; LSB 699; LW 348; NCH 489; WC 506; WIS 59

**Dismissal Blessing**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *And may God strengthen you and bless you with peace; May Christ Jesus bring forth justice for you and among you.*

**Worshipers**

 **Amen.**

**✝ We Depart in Peace ✝**

**Benediction**

*Pastor / Worship Leader*

 *Go in peace; love and care for one another in the name of Christ; and may the Spirit of God which filled John and Jesus, fill your hearts, souls, and minds.*

**Worshipers**

 **Amen.**

**Closing Song**

**Lay Me Down**

Chris Tomlin, Jason Ingram, Jonas Myrin, & Matt Redman, © 2012 Atlas Mountain Songs; Rising Springs Music; S. D. G. Publishing; Thankyou Music; Twelve Lions Music; Worship Together Music; worshiptogether.com songs; Spirit Nashville Three; So Essential Tunes; Spirit Nashville Three

**Hymn of Joy**

Chris Tomlin | Ed Cash, © 2015 Capitol CMG Paragon; S. D. G. Publishing; Twelve Lions Music; Worship Together Music

**How Great Is Our God**

Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash, & Jesse Reeves ©2004 worshiiptogether.com songs/Sixsteps Music/ASCAP

**[Traditional Options]**

**To Jordan’s River Came Our Lord**

HS 98 816; LSB 405

**Herald, Sound the Note of Judgment**

EH 70; LSB 511

**O Lord, How Shall I Meet You**

ELW 241; LBW 23; LSB 334; LW 19; NCH 102; PH 11

***SSS* – *S*ERMON *S*TARTERS & *S*EASONINGS**

*These ideas are intended to provide material and stimulus for your own creativity.*

**Preparing (for) the Way**

**Luke 3:1-6**

Luke chronicles the calling of John the Baptist who preached a baptism of repentance for sins and the good news of salvation. Luke quotes from the Prophet Isaiah that John is the one who is the voice calling from the wilderness and preparing the way for the Lord. He will make the ways straight and smooth. Salvation is at hand.

**Theological Reflections and Practical Applications**

The lectionary splits Luke’s account of John the Baptist’s ministry between the Second and Third Sundays of Advent. This week (v 1-6) focuses on the historical setting and timing and on the fulfillment of prophecy. Next week will focus on the words of John and the reaction of those hearing. Theological reflections and applications could be taken from both week’s services.

Repentance (Greek *metanoia*) is not mere regret for past misdeeds. It means far more than saying, “I’m sorry. Please forgive me.” *Metanoia* means a change of mind and heart, the kind of inner transformation that bears visible fruit. In the Gospel for next Sunday, when the crowds ask him what they need to do, John will spell out precisely the sorts of fruit God expects to see (Luke 3:10–14).

The good news begins with the witness of two prophetic texts from Malachi and Isaiah that announce a forerunner who will go before the coming of God’s Messiah. A messenger of God will go “ahead of you” (Malachi 3:1), one who will: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Isaiah 40:3). The faith in which God’s people have lived in Messianic hope serves as the inaugural word, bringing together the anticipation and fulfillment times of God’s salvation.

Like Moses, like the prophetic voice in Isaiah 40, John challenges God’s people to see the wilderness as a place not of desolation, but of hope. God is calling them, like the Babylonian exiles, to leave their captors behind and head home through the wilderness. God is calling them, like the people of Israel in Egypt, to join an exodus out of slavery into God’s promised fresh start (see Luke 9:31, where Jesus discusses his Exodus with Moses and Elijah). John preaches that the first step on this journey toward freedom is a baptism of repentance.

Mark and Matthew also quote Isaiah 40:3, but Luke expands the quotation to include Isaiah 40:5-6 and the promise that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

The word of God comes not from imperial Rome or even from Israel’s religious establishment. It comes not from someone dressed in fine clothes in an expensive palace, nor from someone inside the Jerusalem Temple. God’s word comes to a wild and wooly man in the desert, on the fringes of society rather than in its halls of power.

In the manner of Old Testament prophetic books and Greco-Roman historians, Luke anchors his story in political history (in this case the reality of Roman occupation), naming the ruling powers of the day. Emperor Tiberias is named, along with Pontius Pilate, Roman governor of Judea, the Herodian rulers (aristocratic collaborators with Rome), and the chief priests Annas and Caiaphas, presiders over the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem. Like any good historian, Luke gave a real, historical framework.

Luke’s litany of imperial, regional, and religious authorities does more than date John’s ministry to 28 or 29 CE. It also contrasts human kingdoms with God’s reign. The claims to authority that Tiberius or Herod or the high priest may make are not ultimate. God’s people owe allegiance first and foremost to God.

John’s baptism of repentance and forgiveness is a call to the people of Judea and those in the city of Jerusalem to turn from their godless ways and receive the forgiveness that is present in God. The baptism of this one who is to come is radically different from that of John’s baptism: “‘I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit'.” This is the role that John plays out in a significant way, calling attention to the one who ushers in God’s kingdom. Jesus is the Messiah whose ministry is empowered by God’s Spirit.

John’s hearers were probably already familiar with two kinds of baptism: the baptism by which Gentile converts became Jews and so embarked on a whole new way of life; and the ritual washings that the Qumran community understood as cleansing them, but only if they turned from their sins and obeyed God. Both types called for changed behavior. John’s baptism of repentance does too.

God does not say, “Tell the people to get ready and when they have done so, I will come to them.” God says, “Prepare the way! I am coming to my people (whether they are ready or not).”

Three authoritative speeches have already announced John’s role in the events that are unfolding: The angel Gabriel speaks to Zechariah about the child with whom he and Elizabeth will be blessed, who will be “filled with the Holy Spirit” and “turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.” With “the spirit and power of Elijah,” he will “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:15b-17). Elizabeth also testifies to her son’s role in the events unfolding when, filled with the Holy Spirit, she interprets the child’s leaping in her womb (1:41-44). Finally, Zechariah is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (1:67) and prophesies concerning his son’s role in God’s coming salvation: “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.” (1:76-79)

The mystery is that people can’t change their sinful disposition towards God. All people are, by their very nature, hostile to God (Romans 3:10-12; 8:7; Colossians 1:21). Therefore, hostile people can’t change their spiritual affections, attitudes, or orientation. Therefore, John preached to persuade people to repent, relying upon the Holy Spirit to use his message to move people to genuine repentance (1 Corinthians 2:14).

**Quotations**

“To prepare the way of the Lord through repentance is to prepare the home of our heart by making it clean for the Holy Spirit.” (Tertullian)

“We can only know the immense atrocity of our sins when we appreciate the magnitude of God’s holiness.” (St. Augustine)

“[We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of a sin.](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/551029)” ([C. S. Lewis](https://www.azquotes.com/author/8805-C_S_Lewis))

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said “Repent,” he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.” (Martin Luther)

“The best way to prepare for the coming of Christ is never to forget the presence of Christ.” ([William Barclay](https://quotefancy.com/william-barclay-quotes))

“Many mourn for their sins but do not truly repent of them, weep bitterly for them, and yet continue in love and league with them.” (Matthew Henry)

“Repentance is the tear of love, dropping from the eye of faith, when it fixes on Christ crucified.” (Gorham Abbott)

“An evidence that our will has been broken is that we begin to thank God for that which once seemed so bitter, knowing that His will is good and that, in His time and in His way, He is able to make the most bitter waters sweet.” (Nancy Leigh DeMoss)

“When a sinner is truly repentant and comes to God in a broken and contrite spirit and asks for forgiveness and God forgives and transforms, it is the working of the Holy Spirit.” (John MacArthur)

“I came to a time and place where I realized that the Way leads to a triumph which is a catastrophe, and to a catastrophe which is a triumph, that the price for committing one’s life would be reproach, and that the only elevation possible to man lies in the depths of humiliation. After that, the word ‘courage’ lost its meaning since nothing could be taken from me. (Dag Hammarskjold)

**Illustrations**

In our churches, we must take care lest we give people the impression that the most important work of the church is meeting a budget, constructing a building, or developing a program. Those are worthy goals and easily measured, but our real goal is to prepare hearts to receive the Lord—a difficult goal to measure. As we build buildings and implement programs, we must remember that the really important work of the church takes place at this less visible, less measurable, level—and that it is the work of the Spirit. We contribute to the Spirit’s work in many ways, especially by prayer and by preparing our hearts to receive the Lord.

A secular radio station recently compared the faith of Tim Tebow and Steph Curry. You may remember that Tebow played quarterback for the University of Florida where he won the two national championships. Tebow has always been outspoken about his faith and often drawn criticism because of it. Steph Curry plays basketball for the Golden State Warriors. Curry is just as outspoken, which is why the station asked: So why is Curry almost universally beloved, celebrated and compensated for his religious beliefs while Tebow is polarizing? Answering this question, Ray Comfort noted that Curry speaks often about his faith and publicly thanks God for his success. He posts scripture verses on social media almost daily. Curry talks often about God’s blessings and about how he can do all things through Jesus. Tebow, however, speaks often about the cross and our need for salvation. He talks about how Jesus died for our sins and that we need Jesus if we want to go to heaven. As a result, he is often criticized and hated.

The idea of preparing the way of the Lord is a word picture because the real preparation must take place in our hearts. Building a road is very much like the preparation God must do in our hearts. They are both expensive, they both must deal with many different problems and environments, and they both take an expert engineer. We often fail to appreciate how important the preparatory work of the Lord is. Any great work of God begins with great preparation. John wonderfully fulfilled this important ministry. “John was God’s bulldozer to build that highway.”

We are reminded again and again that God chooses unlikely people. Someone has said, “How odd of God to choose the Jews!” It was odd of God to choose David, a young lad whose father did not even include him among the sons whom he presented to Samuel for consideration! How odd of God to choose Mary, a young unmarried girl! How odd of God to choose John! Those of us in ministry wonder at our calling. We also wonder at the laypeople who do most of the work in most churches. God has, indeed, “exalted the lowly.”

Preparing for God’s arrival means rethinking systems and structures that we see as normal but that God condemns as oppressive and crooked. It means letting God humble everything that is proud and self-satisfied in us, and letting God heal and lift up what is broken and beaten down. The claims that the world’s authorities make often conflict with God’s claims. Paths that seem satisfactory to us are not good enough for God. John calls us to let God’s bulldozers reshape the world’s social systems and the landscape of our own minds and hearts. God’s ways are not our ways.

Without preparation, we may not receive the full benefits of what is coming. How much more fulfilling if one is prepared, allowing the excitement to build, and preparing one’s mind and heart! Life-changing events may also require a re-organization of priorities. Of course, that requires much more preparation, as people re-configure what really matters in their lives and what should become like “chaff” that a good fire will burn away.

I began ministry in the late 1980’s and this was the dawn of the “seeker sensitive movement.” Since the church was designed to connect people with God, we were told that we should remove barriers that kept unchurched people away. Keep the message positive… no hellfire and damnation stuff. The music should be high quality and upbeat. Churches were built that looked like secular auditoriums and not churches. Eliminate the trappings of religious ceremony. Preach messages relevant to the felt needs of people’s lives. Let them leave feeling a little better about themselves. I don’t think John the Baptist got the memo.

There is one thing that always precedes salvation: REPENTANCE.

Therefore, before we see Jesus enter the scene, we first see His herald.
And heralding is exactly what John the Baptist does.

“Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.”

And if you will make the path beautiful, then,
“all flesh will see the salvation of God.”
It was God’s plan that John come before Jesus.
Before salvation can take place, repentance must take place.

And it is the same today.
If you want God’s presence in your place…
If you want God’s power in your life…
If you want God’s salvation to flow through you…

THEN YOU MUST FIRST REPENT
The King is not going to accept the trashy condition as it is.

In ancient times, when a king was going to visit a city, he would send before him someone to herald his coming, someone to announce that he would be arriving soon. The herald would go around the city, and go before the leaders of the city, telling them all, “The king is coming. He will be here any day. So, clean up your lives. Make sure you are all in obedience to the king’s commands so that you will not be punished when he arrives.”

This herald also served as a city inspector. He would go around the city and make a list of things that needed to be fixed. He would tell them, “Clean up your city. Sweep your streets. Get rid of all the garbage lying around. Round up any criminals to make the city safe. Fix the roads; make them smooth and straight. Make sure the town is gleaming. Make sure the city is fit for a king to ride through.” It was an embarrassment for that city, and the people of the city, if they were not prepared when the king did arrive. It was also an insult to the king if they had not prepared properly for his arrival. If he came, and they were not prepared, he might mete out some judgment and punishment upon the city and its rulers.

**Video Resources**

<https://youtu.be/wL7cBn1s1kk?si=7QvZ08gKmOHC0V4C>

<https://youtu.be/omdRd6XGptQ?si=bfi0z6t37HFJMRk8>

<https://youtu.be/hE93vYsnixA?si=E9KT5H-PMyful4lx>

<https://youtu.be/2hRkAXB9TvQ?si=4D01Vk4P7tmr45Tm>

<https://youtu.be/kqFnw0twW7g?si=0-nGjkXvbaBVWmux>

**CITED RESOURCES FOR**

***WORSHIP ALIVE PLUS!***

Updated for 2024

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**In compliance with copyright laws, lyrics may be downloaded at** **www.SongSelect.com** **through your CCLI subscription, and also through numerous websites such as those listed below.**

**ONLINE RESOURCES**

**Print Music**

**www.fqworship.com**

**www.iwillworship.com**

**www.LifewayWorship.com**

**www.MusicNotes.com**

**www.PraiseCharts.com**

**www.SongSelect.com**

**www.SheetMusicPlus.com**

**www.WeAreWorship.com**

**www.WordMusic.com**

**www.WorshipTeam.com**

**www.WorshipTogether.com**

**Audio & Video Downloads**

**www.amazon.com/mp3**

**www.cbdtunes.christianbook.com**

**www.fqworship.com**

**www.GodVine.com**

**www.itunes.com**

**www.LeadWorship.com**

**www.LifewayWorship.com**

**www.PraiseCharts.com**

**www.WorshipTeam.com**

**www.WorshipTogether.com**

**www.YouTube.com**

**HYMNAL CODES**

**BH75** Baptist Hymnal *(1975)*

**BH91** Baptist Hymnal *(1991)*

**CH** Celebration Hymnal *(Word)*

**CHH** Chalice Hymnal *(Chalice)*

**EH** Episcopal Hymnal *(1982)*

**ELW** Evangelical Lutheran Worship *(Augsburg)*

**HPW** Hymns for Praise and Worship *(Word)*

**HFG** Hymns for the Family of God *(Paragon)*

**HLC** Hymns for the Living Church *(Hope)*

**HGP** Hymns of Glorious Praise *(Gospel Pub House)*

**HSP** Hymns of the Spirit *(Pathway)*

**HS98** Hymnal Supplement 1998 *(Concordia)*

**HWC**Hymnal for Worship & Celebration *(Word)*

**LBW** Lutheran Book of Worship *(Augsburg)*

**LSB** Lutheran Service Book *(Concordia)*

**LW** Lutheran Worship *(Concordia)*

**NCH** New Century Hymnal *(Pilgrim Press)*

**PH** Presbyterian Hymnal *(1990)*

**RH** Rejoice Hymnal *(Tempo)*

**RS** Ritual Song *(G.I.A.)*

**STTL** Sing To The Lord *(Lillenas)*

**TFWS** The Faith We Sing *(Methodist supplement)*

**UMH** United Methodist Hymnal *(1989)*

**WC** The Worshipping Church *(Hope)*

**WOV** With One Voice *(Augsburg)*

**WAR** *Worship and Rejoice (Hope)*

**WHM** *Worship His Majesty (Gaither)*

**WIS** *Worship in Song (Lillenas)*