

In traditional theological perspective, the main purposes of Advent are to prepare for remembering (and re-experiencing) the birth of Jesus at Christmas (the first Advent), and to prepare for the second coming of Jesus (the Second Advent, or the Apocalypse) and the final complete manifestation of the Realm (Kingdom) of God.

Let's go back to our basic theological questions. Use these questions each day to help go deeper into the scripture.

- What does it say about God?
- What does it say about Human beings?
- What does it say about Creation?
- What does it say about the relationship between creation, God, and humanity?

Take time to pray over these questions and maybe write down some thoughts you might have in your journal.

We will be focusing on *Matthew 3:1-12* this week so be sure to spend some time with this passage and reflect using the questions above. Then, each day there will be a shorter passage to connect and use to think more deeply about John the Baptist, baptism, and the anticipation of the coming of Jesus.

Monday December 5th – Read *Malachi 4:5* and *2 Kings 2:1-12* and *Matthew 11:14*. How does the prophecy of Elijah and impending Judgment fit with *Matthew 3:1-12*?

Tuesday, December 6th – Read *2 Kings 1:8*, *Isaiah 40:3* (quoted in *Matthew 3:3*). How does John compare to Elijah? How many people came out to see John in the Jordan river? Was it only people from Judea and Jerusalem?

Wednesday, December 7th – John's baptism can most likely be understood in light of ancient Jewish proselyte baptism. When gentiles were received into membership into the Jewish community, they (both men and women) were baptized, signifying a ritual cleansing, which wasn't required of Jews. The people of Israel aren't ready for the Messiah, according to John, so baptism was an opportunity for Jewish people to repent, confess their sins, and thereby be prepared for the coming of the Messiah. Read *Matthew 3:10, 7:16-20, 12:33*. How do these verses fit with the theme of repentance? What image is used?

Thursday, December 8th – Read *Matthew 3:9*. What do John's words do for Gentiles? See *Joel 2:28-29*. When the Messiah comes, the time is up. The Messiah will come, judge, and create a purified community.

Friday, December 9th – Martin Luther said, "Good works do not make a [person] good, but a good [person] does good works." Read *1 Corinthians 12:3*, and *Matthew 3:8, 10*. Being purified, cleansed by the grace of Christ, and given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Saturday, December 10th – Today, many generations after John the Baptist, we live in a time after the crucifixion, the resurrection, the command to baptize, and Pentecost. How can we remember, even commemorate, in a way that inspires us to bear good fruit, repent and believe the Gospel?

Look at the prayer list. Who can you pray for? Who needs a little extra help in an area where you can make a difference?

Healing Strength: Garnett Landreth (Debi & Becky's Uncle), Margie Townsend's Father, Rex Townsend, Stan Ensich, Chris Osborn (Ken and Sandy Grubb's daughter), Janet Coons (Donna McCullough's daughter)

Homebound Members: Mary Hicks, Mary Schmidt, Joann Young, Jeanne Carman

Military Personnel: Adam Walters, Joseph Roberts, Lucas Lamkin, Adam Clark