

Mark 1:4-11

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a

voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Well, Christmas is over! We spent all of the Advent season in preparation mode. Preparing for the birth of our Lord. I had asked four people to be brave and do a short “temple talk” on how they prepare for the season. Marlene shared with us a cute poem using M&M’s. It reminded us of the star that shone brightly in the East, guiding the shepherds and wise men to the stable. It also reminded us of the manger - the humble place where Jesus slept. And most importantly, it reminded us that He is worthy of all of the worship He received on the night of His birth and every night since.

Next, Karen spoke of a family tradition of the Advent calendar that we did with our children. We hoped that with

all of the things we put into that calendar, preparing for a life of service to others was the most important. We tried to instill in our kids how important a life full of fun, learning and service to others is.

Finally, we got some beautiful words from Ruth about how her time of preparation has changed over the years. How focussing more on the religious aspect of Christmas - the TRUE meaning - is so much more important than the secular meaning of Christmas and how focussing more on that has actually changed her.

All of you probably have some way that you prepare for Christmas every year. But what about how you prepare for other things in life? Do you ever feel like all you are doing is preparing for one thing after another? Take down the Christmas tree, start to prepare for Easter - after all, Ash Wednesday is only 5 weeks away! The Lenten season,

much like the Advent season, is also one of preparation. Once Easter is done, we start to prepare our lives for Summer. People open cabins, get out their boats and ATVs, clean up their yards and do all the necessary preparations for the next season. And so it goes, year after year, constantly preparing for something.

But what are we really all preparing for all the time? Well, we should be preparing for the return of Jesus and preparing to enter the Kingdom of God... and I don't just mean preparing for our death and resurrection. The Kingdom of God is here and now. That means that we should always be finding ways in which to live in that Kingdom the way God wants us to live - by serving others and living a life that is pleasing to God.

In today's gospel, we are once again reminded that John the Baptist appeared to have one goal in life - preparing

people for the coming of the Messiah. I subscribe to a daily devotional from Luther Seminary called God Pause. This week, one of the devotions spoke about this idea. Here is what was written:

“Do you arrive at church services in time to hear the preludes? If so, do you settle in, listen, meditate, and prepare yourself to begin worship? Preparations before beginning important endeavors—including worship and ministries—foster meaningful experiences. Today’s gospel text affirms this. John the Baptist was a prelude to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. John got people’s attention with his words and lifestyle, which may have reminded the Israelites of Elijah, the prophet they expected would return. John wasn’t Elijah, but he certainly prophesied! He proclaimed a new beginning that would come with the one—Jesus—who was more powerful than himself. John didn’t refuse to be “only” a prelude to Jesus. He

understood preparations are important. He embraced his call to prepare people for receiving Jesus. Sometimes it's hard for us to be a prelude rather than the "main event." But preludes are important for successful future beginnings!"

I do like thinking of all of our preparations as the prelude to something bigger. I like thinking of it that way because, just as the author of this devotional stated, preludes are important for successful beginnings! So, what more successful way to prepare for our futures than to be baptized?! Of course, for most of us, baptism was not our choice, but rather the choice of our parents or guardians. But what *is* our choice is how we live up to and live in our baptisms. Because most of us do not remember our own baptisms, I believe it is always important to be reminded of the covenant made between us and God during our baptisms. The ELCA covenant states: We are to "...**live**

among God's faithful people; **hear** the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper; **proclaim** the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; **serve** all people following the example of Jesus; and **strive** for justice and peace in all the earth."

When we were baptized into the family of God, we joined Jesus in this covenant. He was baptized by John, and just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." God says the same thing about us - you are my child and with you I am well pleased. But, we don't always do things that are pleasing to God. We sin, we deny, we judge others - we don't always hold up our end of that covenant. And, lucky for us, our physical baptism was just a prelude - a preparation

for how we should strive to live everyday. The main event wasn't the pouring of the water on our heads. The main event happens everyday - how we treat others, how we act out the "live, hear, proclaim, serve and strive" verbs from the covenant. And, in order to do that the way God hopes we do, we have to always be reminded not only of our own baptismal covenant, but also of the relationship that God wants with us.

Every Sunday, I choose a sermon song that hopefully reflects or illuminates the words I have spoken in my sermon. I usually don't mention the song, except for a few times. Today, I want to explicitly explain why I chose *Borning Cry*. In order to adequately explain, I want to read to you some cool information I found about the song:

"*Borning Cry*" is one of the most popular songs in recent hymnals. The ballad style of the music lends itself to a feeling of a love song. A love song it is—between God

and the singer. Many hymns address God from the human perspective, but few address humanity from God's point of view. The spirit of "Borning Cry" is one of a God who loved us from the beginning of time and continues to love us throughout the seasons of our life.

The author and composer is John Carl Ylvisaker, a native of Fargo, N.D. He studied at Concordia College in Minnesota, where he received a bachelor's degree in 1959. Following further studies at Luther Northwestern Seminary (now Luther Seminary) in St. Paul, the University of Minnesota and St. Cloud State College, he worked as a voice teacher from 1971-75 in Buffalo, Minn. From 1973-86, Mr. Ylvisaker served as the music director for the Lutheran Church of the Reformation in St. Louis Park, Minn.

The composition of “Borning Cry” began in 1985, when Mr. Ylvisaker was asked to prepare a series on baptism. In addition to the lyrical melody and text that allows God to sing a love song to humanity, “Borning Cry” gives us a sense of the timelessness of God. The final stanza of the seven-stanza hymn is the same as the first stanza. While we think of ourselves as finite beings, God re-creates us and gives us new life in the baptismal waters, a spiritual regeneration that lasts for eternity.”

This song, this reminder of not only our prelude but also our main event - life itself - sums up that we will have God along side us through every action we take. The baptism of Jesus, as described in today’s gospel, foreshadowed the baptism of the Holy Spirit that believers would experience. As followers of Christ, we are not only baptized with water but with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This baptism signifies our new life in

Christ, a life empowered by the Spirit. The words spoken by the Father to Jesus echo a truth for each believer. In Christ, we are God's beloved children. Our identity is rooted in God's love, and we are pleasing to Him. This affirmation is not based on our achievements but on our relationship with Christ.

Just as Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry, our baptism signifies our commitment to follow Christ. It's a call to live in obedience to His teachings and to share the love and grace we've received. The baptism of Jesus is not just a historical event but a profound revelation of our identity as followers of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live transformed lives, and through our baptism, we receive the divine affirmation that we are beloved children of God. As we reflect on this passage, let us embrace our identity in

Christ, live out our commitment to Him, and continually be filled with the Holy Spirit. May our lives, like Jesus', bring glory and pleasure to our heavenly Father. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,

Help us to remember and live out our baptismal covenants everyday. Help us to always be preparing for the return of your Son, but while we are preparing, let us not get lost in the preparation itself. Remind us that whether our role in life is that of the “prelude” or that of the “main event”, no matter how insignificant our acts of kindness and love may seem on the large scale, or no matter how many people we have affected, each interaction we make makes a difference. So, let those interactions be what You want them to be. A smile to one person or a world-wide charity event - both are examples of us living out our baptismal

covenants. Thank-you for guiding us and being with us through every stage of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.