

lr-nt-05
January 28-February 3
Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3
“Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord
By Lenet Hadley Read

(As John the Baptist was called to prepare the way for Christ’s first coming --- **so we are called to prepare the way for Christ’s Return**).

- I. In preparing the way for Jesus Christ, John the Baptist called on all to Repent.
 - A. Repentance means to completely change our hearts; to turn to righteous living.
 - B. In addition to having pure hearts, **we must bring forth good fruits to Christ**.
“every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down” (Luke 39).

- II. When Jesus came, although many people sought to continue to follow John the Baptist, he did not hesitate to give up their honoring of him, and to turn them to Christ.
 - A. “He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Mathew 1:11).
 - B. This was in great contrast to the leaders of the Jews at the time. While they claimed to be inheritors of the priesthood through Abraham, the truth is **that they were not in the proper order to have inherited that role**.

For during the Maccabean period, the High Priests, etc. began to be appointed by the rulers, often from their own family. This happened in spite of the fact they were not Levites, descendants of Aaron. Now, under Herod, those claiming the High Priesthood had obtained their roles through bribery. (Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, New York: Paulist Press, 1984. pp. 519, 524).

This is why the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as Christ with such great hostility. They were not the true priesthood bearers of that time.

C. And no wonder John the Baptist said to them: “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come” (Matthew 3:7). This was a time of an unrighteous priesthood, as also proclaimed by those who fled into the wilderness due to the wickedness of those priests, and left the writings of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

- III. **In fact, Jesus, like Samuel, had come to replace the old corrupt priesthood with a new priesthood**. After baptism, he immediately set out to call twelve apostles. That this would be the make-up of the leadership of His New Kingdom had been repeatedly prophesied.
 - A. It began with Jacob’s having twelve sons, (which was obviously not an accident), and the Lord’s purposeful division of Israel into twelve tribes.
 - B. This established a pattern for twelve great leaders, witnesses, and judges over Israel.
 - C. Continuing this pattern, the Lord chose a leader (or Judge) from each tribe (Numbers 1:44), therefore creating again the number of twelve (12).

IV. After crossing the Jordan River, **the Lord commanded Israel to choose twelve stones as witnesses that this great and miraculous event had occurred** (Joshua 4).

A. The crossing of the Jordan, led by Joshua, pointed to Jesus Christ's conquering of death and leading His people into Eternal Life, their True Promised Land.

B. His commandment **that these twelve stones were a memorial or witness** of that **great crossing** set a significant step in the pattern.

C. **All these patterns taught of and were fulfilled when Jesus chose twelve apostles who were to bear witness that He had atoned for our sins, had been crucified, but had risen again in the Resurrection. And that He had thus prepared the way whereby men could "pass over death" and inherit Eternal Life.**

V. In fact, Jesus deliberately began His ministry with baptism, which was a witness of His upcoming Death and Resurrection

A. And there is much significance in the selection of that site at the Jordan River.

1. The valley surrounding the Jordan, with the River itself being the lowest point, forms **the deepest inland trench of the earth**; furthermore, the River feeds into the *Dead Sea*, which is 1300 feet below sea level.

a. **The first symbolism in baptism is descending into death.** Likely Jesus chose these lowest of waters to witness that in His death He would descend below all things.

b. In addition, through the experiences of the Children of Israel, the **Jordan River was set as a witness of the barrier between mortal life and Eternal Life, which is Death.**

B. Thus Joshua's leading Israel through that barrier to inherit a Promised Land testified that Jesus through His Death and Resurrection would lead us to Eternal Life.

C. His appearance and baptism there testified He had come to fulfill this witness.

D. The Savior entered Jordan's deepest waters, emerging from them to testify at the beginning of His ministry that **He had come to be the personage and instrument --- the True Joshua, the True Ark of the Covenant --- who would pass through death (symbolized by the Jordan), and be the means by which all might pass through Death and inherit Eternal Life.**

VI. So, in order to fulfill all righteousness, Jesus set the example and showed the path for us to follow ---- that we might repent and be willing to die to our old sins, be cleansed through His atonement, and rise as new beings to a new life with Him.

VII. The Witness of the Dove added to this symbolism.

A. As Jesus came up out of the waters, the heavens opened and a dove descended, lighting upon the Savior. It manifest that the Holy Ghost had descended upon Him.

a. The dove at Christ's baptism also witnessed of the peace and truth coming to us if we follow Jesus' example, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost.

B. Remember that after the Flood of Death in Noah's time, the dove (and its olive leaf) were symbols of a Newly-cleansed Land where peace and truth would reign. (Matthew 3:16-17; Also D&C 88, described as an "olive leaf," promises a Comforter and great blessings in the Celestial Kingdom).

C. Jesus with the Dove was witnessing that He (and the Holy Ghost) had come to lead us into the Promised Land of Peace and Comfort. That is, of Eternal Life,

- VIII. While Jesus taught the importance of baptism by example, many deny the Way.
- A. First, some deny the need to be baptized, placing misunderstood words of the *disciple* (Paul), over the words of the *Master*, Jesus the Christ, who taught **all must be baptized** (John 3:3,5).
 - B. Some deny the importance of the beautifully symbolic “burial” and “resurrection” which manifests the true meaning of “baptism.”
 - C. Most deny the need to have true authority to baptize.
 - D. And unfortunately, most **deny the ordinance needed to bestow the Holy Ghost**, the laying on of hands.

But the Master had come “to prepare the way.”

While John the Baptist prepared the way for Him, He was preparing the way for Us.

He had come to make the crooked paths, which men had previously been following and led nowhere, straight.

It is at His Second Coming that all things will be fulfilled. Then the Mountains will be made low, and the Valleys lifted up. Not only will this happen physically, but spiritually. For as Mary, His mother, testified, He will lift up the poor and downtrodden (if they are righteous), and will cast down the proud (if they are unrighteous). (Luke 1:46-55).

We should feel a great sense of gratitude and a great responsibility that like John the Baptist, we are called to prepare the way for Christ, when all things will be fulfilled. This means, like him, we should invite all we can to Repent, to be Baptized, and to Come unto Christ.