

Advent 2: PREPARE

Luke 3:1-6 [MW18-40]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai & Wellsford, Sunday 09 December 2018

Three men were discussing coincidences in a local bar. The first man said, "My wife was reading *A Tale of Two Cities* and she gave birth to twins." "That's funny," the second man remarked, "my wife was reading *The Three Musketeers* and she gave birth to triplets." The third man shouted, "Oh no! Oh my gosh! I have to rush home!" When asked what the problem was, he exclaimed, "When I left the house, my pregnant wife was reading *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*"!!!

When you get the news that you're going to have a baby

- what do you do???

[responses???

- you begin to get ready!!!

- you prepare!!!

you know you have about nine months to do this

so you get on to it ...

What would happen if you didn't use those months wisely to get ready ...

- you might end up with no nappies, no baby clothes, no special things

and these are not items you are likely to have just lying about

not things you can guarantee to pick up at the last minute!

- no, the point is that once you know a baby is on the way

you have to start getting ready then and there

so you're not "caught short"

"Getting ready" – that's what this time before Christmas is all about

- we think it's so important we give it a special name: "Advent"

the four weeks leading up to December 25, Christmas

are used in the church to get ready for the baby, the baby Jesus

- it's necessary to have a preparation time so we don't miss out

to make sure we get ourselves and our church ready to celebrate

- we prepare to celebrate the amazing event of God

the Creator and Sustainer of absolutely everything

coming into our world as a baby

This is a positive thing

- we do this so we can "enjoy the baby"

just like if you have the bassinet, the high-chair, the pram, the car seat,

and the baby toys, you can really enjoy the new baby who comes into your life

So, we've got the news: Christmas is coming

- in fact unlike with the birth of a baby we know the exact time it will happen

December 25, sixteen days from now

- I'm taking a bit of a stab in the dark here

but I'm guessing that not many of us here this morning

are getting ready for the birth of a baby ...

However Christmas is coming for all of us, nothing surer
- so what do we have to do to get ready for Christmas???

[space for responses???

If you're going away, there's accommodation to be sorted
- travel bookings, car servicing, trip planning, that kind of thing
Christmas cards to be written and sent
presents to be bought, wrapped, posted, delivered
- if you have people coming to stay you have to get that all ready
bedding, food, sort out some things to do
- there's the meals to be planned, supermarket shopping and all that goes with it
getting and decorating a tree

When you sit down and think about it
- there's a whole lot to it ...

Just this week a startling brand new image came to me for this time of year
- and when I share it with you, you may indeed agree that it is rather startling
or unsettling, or at the very least unusual and out of left field ...

It goes like this
- for our second reading we had a traditional Bible reading for this time of year
that describes John the Baptist beginning his work of telling people about God
about the new thing that God was about to do

And it seems to me this is John the Baptist announcing the results of a "*pregnancy test*"!
- the message John gave was as unexpected, as shocking, as jolting
as life-changing as being told: "you're going to have a baby"
- it meant they knew something momentous was just around the corner
they had time to get ready
- and if they didn't get ready
the consequences would be every bit as disastrous
as if people knew they were going to have a baby and did nothing
- absolutely nothing
until the baby arrived ...

Would you do that? Would you even consider doing that?
- what about knowing that you've got a family coming to stay for Christmas
would you do nothing until they arrived on the doorstep?

John the Baptist doesn't just whisper quietly in your ear
- he shouts at the top of his voice so all the neighbours
and the people in the next street too, can hear
- "You're pregnant! He is coming! You better jolly well get ready!"

John was referring of course to the coming appearance of Jesus, Son of God, on the scene

- he said things like, "Take a good long hard look at yourself"
- "Wake your ideas up!"
- "Stop thinking only of yourself"
- "Share what you have"
- "Turn around and live God's way!"

All of this applies to us in the weeks leading up to Christmas

- it's kind of a check list
- a reminder, an encouragement to get the best out of this special season
- in order to get the best out of Christmas

Mary Batchelor writes about it like this:

When someone you like is coming to stay, you may find it hard to wait for the day to arrive. But there are all kinds of things to do first in order to be ready for the visitor. The Christian church calls the four weeks before Christmas 'Advent' and that word means 'coming'. It is the time of year when we get ready for the coming of the most important Guest of all time – Jesus Christ.

Advent reminds us of three different 'comings' of Jesus. The first is in the past. It happened long ago at the first Christmas. Jesus, God's Son, who made our world, came to live in it as a baby, then as a boy, and a man who gave his life to bring us close to God. The second 'coming' belongs in the present because Jesus is waiting to come now to every person who invites him into their heart and life. The third 'coming' of Jesus is still in the future. One day Jesus will come back to our world, not as a little, helpless baby, but as King and Judge of all.

So Advent is the season for getting ready – ready to ask Jesus into our lives and ready for the day when he will come again.

I began by talking about a baby

- today we are looking forward to celebrating God coming to us as a baby at Christmas
- a baby is special
- and helps us to focus on the Good News of all God's blessings

Scientist Carl Sandburg says:

A baby is God's opinion that life should go on. A book that does nothing to you is dead. A baby, whether it does anything to you, represents life. If a bad fire should break out in this house and I had my choice of saving the library or the babies, I would save what is alive. Never will a time come when the most marvellous recent invention is as marvellous as a newborn baby. The finest of our precision watches, the most supercolossal of our supercargo planes, don't compare with a newborn baby in the number and ingenuity of coils and springs, in the flow and change of chemical solutions, in timing devices and interrelated parts that are irreplaceable. The baby here is very modern. Strictly. Yet it is also the oldest of the ancients.

Every baby born is a miracle

- just ponder that for a moment
a tiny life that has begun from almost nothing
and nine months later, there is the baby
- how amazing is that!

That God enters our world and shares our life as a baby is a miracle

- just ponder that for a moment
God who is the Creator of the universe and Sustainer of all life
comes to be with us as a baby
- how amazing is that!

Are you prepared, really and truly prepared, for that???

I came across this, written by Allen Hunt, which I found very helpful

- and I leave it with you for this coming week ...

Right after Anita and I were married, we invited my boss and his wife over to our house for dinner. We planned for weeks. We mapped out the menu. We shopped. We did all the preparations of cleaning the house, and pruning, and straightening everything up, and making sure everything was just so. We wanted things to be right when my boss arrived.

Someone far greater than that is coming to visit you and me. What do you need to do to prepare? That's what Advent is about. What in your life needs to be made straight? Are there habits you need to begin or maybe end? Are there some relationships that need a little cleaning up? Do you need to take a look at how you use your time or how you use your money? Now is your time to make it straight — to get ready. John the Baptist reminds you to "Prepare the way of the Lord."