

December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
Year A; 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent  
Isaiah 11: 1-10  
Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19  
Matthew 3: 1-12

### **Matthew 3:1-12**

*In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,*

*"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:*

*'Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.'"*

*Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

*But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

*"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

***In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

**This season of Advent goes so quickly, just four Sundays, and today we are already on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday. It seems the world is moving extra fast in the month of December, and thus Advent can get pulled into the whirl of the month, and so easily slip through our fingers.**

**The lighting of the candles on the Advent wreath helps me to slow down a little, to stop in the silence as the flame lights the candle, and to hear the prayer. As we live in the growing darkness of winter's arrival, the Advent candles quietly bring more light into our days.**

Our reading today from Isaiah foreshadows the birth of Jesus, the shoot that shall come from the stump of Jesse, the light that will bring unimaginable peace, where the wolf and the lamb will live together.

And our gospel reading brings us John the Baptist, offering baptism at the River Jordan, and calling out with urgency, for us all to repent, to turn from our selfish and often hate-filled ways, and to be vessels of the light of our coming savior.

A devotional I read recently referred to the poem “I will Light Candles this Christmas” written by the poet and preacher Howard Thurman.

The poem reads:

*I will light candles this Christmas,  
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,  
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,  
Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
Candles of love to inspire all my living,  
Candles that will burn all year long.*

Howard Thurman saw much sadness, despair and fear in his lifetime, and still urged folks to light candles of hope, and courage and peace.

The writer Laura Haller noted about Thurman’s life:

*“[Howard Thurman](#) lived during the most amazing time in the history of our world. Born in 1899 in horse and buggy days and the grandson of a former slave, Thurman died in 1981, the year the IBM personal computer debuted. In 1953 *Life* magazine named Thurman one of the twelve greatest preachers of the century.”*

Thurman saw much in his lifetime, spanning an era of great change, much heartache, and intense struggle in our country. He saw days both hopeful and tempest tossed. Thurman was just 19 years old when the 1918 flu pandemic broke out.

He lived through World War I and World War II.

He was a mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and active in the Civil Rights movement.

Howard Thurman was a powerful preacher, and his poem invites us still to light candles, in our tempest tossed days. Our days in 2022 with heartbreaking war in Ukraine, political tension in our country, the Covid pandemic, and still struggles and heartbreak over racial equality. We too are called to offer the love and light of Jesus that the darkness will never put out.

Unsung Hero Sunday here at Trinity is purposefully scheduled for December, this month where we light candles in the gathering darkness of winter, and where we hear again the story of the birth of our savior, and our call to offer God's light in our still hurting and broken world.

We are blessed to hear stories of folks, our Unsung Heroes, who offer in the words of Howard Thurman:

*Candles of love to inspire all (our) living,  
Candles that will burn all year long.*

*Amen.*