

The beautiful country now lays in waste. Their fellow countrymen, their friends, their homes are gone. Isaiah's audience sees this, just before the prophecy of the OT reading. The 12 tribes had just been reduced to 2. The people of Judea, southern kingdom of Israelites, look across the border to the northern kingdom of the 10 tribes, it's a wasteland. Assyrian armies marched through with a scorched-earth policy. The "lucky" Israelites of the north have been led away into captivity with fishhooks through their lips. Given the brutality of the Assyrians, they're the lucky ones. 10 tribes gone. Yesterday, they were there. Now, they're removed from history, it's a wasteland.

That's what failing to repent, turning from the Lord's Word will get you. Because they want other gods to take care of them, the Lord has granted them their desire: those gods have the responsibility of providing for them, protecting them from enemies like the Assyrians.

God was patient and called and called and called to them. He sent prophets, like Elijah, Hosea, Joel, Amos but they wouldn't listen. He uses the evil Assyrian king as His instrument to show false gods only bring destruction, death.

The people of Judea, the last 2 tribes, are devastated, shocked. God sent them prophets, like Isaiah. Later Jeremiah to call the small, weak Judea to repent, or they will suffer the same. But they don't listen. God is patient and patient, but they'd rather be spiritual but not religious, have some other gods, redefine what is sin, justify their lifestyle choices, believe in God on their terms. 135 years later, Babylonians will destroy Judea, along with the 1st Jerusalem temple, cut them down to stumps. But there is hope. God does not give up on them. The Lord is still faithful to His Word, a promised Savior would be born to David's line, though the family tree of Jesse, the father of King David, is cut down to a stump, a shoot will sprout: a Savior will come. And bear fruit from His branch.

Rejecting our Lord's Word, mixing it with idolatrous ways, living life on your terms, lack of repentance, leads to destruction, a wasteland, even in lives today. There is only one hope.

And that's why God sends us John the Baptist. Every year in Advent, John comes in to stir up our hearts; He's the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, **Prepare the way of the LORD. Repent the kingdom of heaven is at hand.** John the Baptist. last of the OT prophets. with

what you want, what you wish, does not matter. This is not some game. This is life and death. This is what you need, what is necessary. It is the Truth. Embrace this Christ or be destroyed, rejecting the true Christ is inviting God's wrath.

He will not lie to appease their feelings. He will not water down the message of the Lord. He will not ignore the false doctrine being taught. He will not gloss over the different teaching in the church. For he will not trivialize God's Word.

When John says, **Repent! The kingdom of heaven is at hand**; He's not telling people to hurry up and say, 'I'm sorry'. Beware in this, just saying I'm sorry, lip service, while you plan to do it again, say you're sorry and don't care much about sin - will damn you. Repentance is to turn from your lives of sin, turn toward God in humble faith, to conform your life to Him. St. Paul said it well when he says, **I die every day!** Our sinful self, daily drowned in your baptism and a forgiven, new creation raised to life each day. Repentance - a constant, ongoing, way of life in the Christian. Yes a daily struggle against sin and daily rising to new life.

He's always calling us to turn away from our sins and worldly loves, to prepare; don't fall in love with how the world celebrates Christmas, but have your heart focused on the Child who comes in poverty, why He comes, what He must do, to have you, save you.

The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. There are 2 responses. Perhaps apathy, no concern over sin and the king coming will bring the destruction you've earned. Or, for those who sorrow over sin, the **kingdom of heaven at hand** is not for apprehension or threat, but of greatest comfort. For the kingdom, for Christ coming to embrace His dear children. To comfort you with His kingdom of forgiveness, life.

The kingdom of heaven at hand – God is coming to deal with sin. Theirs, yours, mine. Jesus is near! Over and over again the Lord calls out to you. He will not give up on you. Don't insist on holding on to your sins. Don't ignore those sins you've grown to accept. The message of Advent is to repent and believe this. The kingdom is at hand because Jesus is coming, even this day, working repentance in you, emboldening you to life as His child should, bearing His fruit, bringing you His very fruits of forgiveness from the branch of His cross in the Supper. **Prepare His way. Prepare for the Lord.** And you are. for you are forgiven. in the