



## The Baptist! Repent!

That John the Baptist is a stark and bothersome figure in today's Gospel. I've always said, nobody decorates their house with John the Baptist. In your Christmas crèche, we never put up figures of John the Baptist. He's too disturbing. The Baptist looks funny, is dressed funny, and insults those around him.

We don't see his face on Christmas cards either. Ever get a Christmas card with John the Baptist on the front. And you open the card to read the message: "You brood of vipers." Season Greetings. I don't think so. "The ax lies at the root. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Merry Christmas from the Wilsons.

Or instead of decorating your front porch with the words Happy Holidays, you hang 6 large letters: R E P E N T. Repent. After all, that is the Advent message of the Baptist. Repent. Maybe the Baptist is unusual during Advent because our culture is addicted to cozy.

Maybe we shudder at the word repent. It brings on feelings of guilt. It reminds us of those threatening TV evangelists who scream words of doom and gloom. Repent means we have to do something hard. Well, yes. All of these things are true and they carry the same weight as the words of Jesus last week, Stay Awake. Two words to shake us and make us pay attention to the fate of our souls. This week, we get only one word. Repent. But what does it have to do with Advent?

The original Gospels were written in Greek: And repent was originally **Metanoia**. My Bible dictionary defines Metanoia as: have a change of heart, turn from one's sins, change one's ways, a change of mind. In Greek, "meta" means change: like in the word metamorphosis or metabolism. "Noia" means mind, intellect, way of seeing. So it is more than just listing of your sins, or a falling to your knees, (although those are good practices), Metanoia means a change of your lifestyle.

How does that look for you? Maybe ...

- a change in the way you see people and think about people
- a change in the way you communicate with Jesus
- a change in how you spend your money and time
- a change of the channel
- a change of habit

It will be different for each person. Metanoia. Repent.

When someone hears the word repent. They might react with fear and guilt. It sounds like a scolding from an angry God. Well, if that is what's needed to change your mind, then so be it.

But others will hear the word repent and think, yes, there are a few things I would like to change in my life, and I am willing to start during Advent. I am able to make a change of heart, change of ways. I have been waiting for **just** this opportunity. In fact, many of you do this already in your living rooms. Here's what I mean.

Your living room or your family room is set up in a practical way. It works for you. Same ol same ol. Couch goes there, TV is there, and the table is here. It doesn't really change from month to month. ... until December.

During Advent, something happens to the whole family. You are somehow willing to change all that furniture around, in order to make room for something beautiful. The Christmas Tree. You allow for this **pine tree** to enter your kingdom and take over. It smells great and is decorated with history and traditions, and lights. You want this change to happen.

You don't mind moving furniture and you like the way it changes your family. Same with metanoia, Conversion. We repent of our stubborn ways and allow God to change us. We move the furniture of our lives to make room for him. With God's help and the desire for something better, it is not that hard to repent. You'll do it for the sake of something good and beautiful. Like the tree, like Christ.

One last point about repentance:

We do not repent so that God will come closer to us. We do not go to confession so that God will finally love us. No. God is already close, He is never far from us.

We repent so that he can do with us what he came to do. To make the world a better place. He's already here. We just need to move the furniture so he can get to work ... through us. Change your life for the sake of others, and building up the Body of Christ. Let him into your living room, make the changes needed, move the furniture.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make changes in your life. Make straight his paths.