

Bay City Wesleyan Church
December 4, 2016

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Second Sunday of Advent 2016

Declaring what we believe because it shapes our view of the future.

<http://bible.com/events/136572>

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Lighting the Second Candle of the Advent Wreath: REPENT!

Matthew 3:1-12 NIV

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' " John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

What do you believe?

If your first response is that you don't believe in anything you can't see, touch, hear, smell, or taste, then you're in the right place.

If your response is that you're not sure what you can believe anymore, you're in the right place.

What do you believe?

1. No matter what we believe, life doesn't turn out as we plan.

Life in this world is scarred by bombshells of pain and loss.

The drip, drip, drip of repeated setbacks causes more intense distress than the bombshells of loss.

When your hope is deferred, you will begin to ask questions.

- How long will you hide, Lord?
- Where are you, God?
- Why don't you do something?
- Do you know me?
- Do you care?
- Do you exist?

2. You aren't the only person to ask questions like these.

You are not the first. You are not the last. And you are not alone. There are others in this room who have asked these questions they are wrestling with them now.

Luke 1:5-7 NLT

When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

Like an uncontrolled forest fire, defiant anxiety began to consume Zachariah's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy. That anxiety delivered only despair.

3. The story is not over yet.

Luke 1:8-25 NLT

One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying. While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly." Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years." Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time." Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long. When he finally did come out, he couldn't speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary. When Zechariah's week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home. Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. "How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."

Luke 1:57-80 NLT

When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John!" "What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." Instantly Zechariah

could speak again, and he began praising God. Awe fell upon the whole neighborhood, and the news of what had happened spread throughout the Judean hills. Everyone who heard about it reflected on these events and asked, "What will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was surely upon him in a special way. Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy: "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people. He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live. "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace." John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

Sermon in a Sentence:

Defiant anxiety delivers despair.
Determined faith develops hope.

4. You can decide between despair and hope.

Jesus will help you.

A new point of view:

There's something that drives you to distraction when your plans crash continually. Something changes deep in your heart when your dreams consistently turn into nightmares. Like an uncontrolled forest fire, defiant anxiety can consume your energy and deliver only despair. But when Jesus reveals his powerful presence, he inspires a determined faith that develops hope for the future.

What's next? Where do I start?

1. You must face your fears.

2. You need to act in faith. Keep on trying despite your disappointments.

3. You need to embrace God's grace.

4. You must read the Bible and pray. I'd suggest reading one Psalm and one chapter of the Gospels each day. Start your day asking God to guide you through the day. Close the day thanking him for at least five blessings.