

“Singing in the Season: Welcome to our World”
John 1:1-13
Preparing a Place
Second Sunday of Advent

Pastor Josh Sawyer
First Christian Church
Omaha, NE

The baby is coming. The Christ child is on its way. If we allow ourselves to enter the season through Mary, then it has been months since she was told the news by an angel that she was to bear a child by the power of the Holy Spirit. By now she was in her final month of pregnancy. According to the bump (an online resource for people expecting a child), Jesus was the size of a honeydew melon or watermelon; depending on if she was past 36 weeks (Can you tell that I am an overjoyed expecting father?). By this time, Caesar Augustus may have even called for the census that caused Mary and Joseph to travel around 80 miles along the Jordan River from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

The Christ child is almost ready to be born, anew. How are we getting ready?

(Slide of House and National Lampoon Christmas)

Since we are *Singing in the Season*, this Advent, I find myself wondering how we will get ready to welcome the Christ child into our world, in particular through our carol today. How will we prepare to welcome the Christ child into our community, into our lives?

That is along the lines of the question I asked this week on Facebook (Slide of question of the week): What are some of the things you do in order to prepare for Christmas. Lexi and I always have to watch “Love Actually” and “It’s a Wonderful Life” Chris Froning said this is a must for her and Bawn, too. In addition, Bawn mentioned that he watches “Die Hard”. Lisa Kerley said she has to listen to Manheim Steamroller when she puts up the tree and that she makes “dobbies” or Monkey bread on Christmas morning.

In order to mediate on how we prepare for Christmas, I would like us to look at two different people and examine how they each, at different times and under different

circumstances prepared a place for Jesus. Our first look is at John the Baptist (**Slide of John the Baptist**), the man who ate wild honey and locusts, the man who cried out in the desert for people to make their paths straight, the man who was ultimately beheaded because of his faith. The other person is Mary, the mother of Jesus. She, in a very different way prepared a place for Jesus. Although she is belittled on a number of occasions, even by Jesus (when he proclaims that his mother and father and brothers and sisters are those who do the will of God, not merely those who brought him into this world), Mary is a beautiful example of the season of Advent; for it was Mary's body that bore him.

It is right for us to begin with the gospel of John because as we attempt to sing in the season it is the gospel of John that is poetic and hymnic in its telling. If we read the gospel of John like a text book then we are reading it poorly, for the gospel of John is a telling of the life of Jesus, but it is an artistic telling of that life. It is not concerned like Matthew and Luke of the history of Jesus' family line. Instead it begins with this beautiful story of the God who is the word, who is light, who is life.

Let us listen to the word of God. John 1:1-13 Video

The verses that were left out of the video are important: "There came a man from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light."

Before we can proclaim Emmanuel or God is with us we must understand what it means to wait on God, to prepare a place for God, to prepare a way for God. John prepared a way for Jesus by testifying that Jesus was the light. John spent his life preparing a way and a place for Jesus that would allow Christ's ministry to flourish; that would allow Jesus to be a known quantity; that would provide people an understanding of who Jesus was and what Christ represented.

How are we preparing a place?

Mary provides us a very different understanding. **(Slide of first painting of Mary)** I love a few images paintings of Daniel Bonnel's. The first is Mary in her ninth month. In this depiction of Mary I love how Bonnel extenuates Mary's bump. She is ready to give birth; probably uncomfortable, as her organs moving around to accommodate Jesus, even her breathing hurting at times. Her head is tilted and her hands resting upon her stretched belly. She must be tired, sleeping, though baby Jesus may be kicking inside of her.

The second **(Slide of second painting of Mary with poem)** is entitled Madonna and Child.

Madonna and Child

After the bloodless union of virgin and ghost,
having woken, unbroken, to the truth of the news
blown in on a gust of angel wings,
having been cursed with the seed of a blessing,
she carries her burden inside
to the wary eyes of one dusted with shavings;
lets the secret carry itself outside.

(Slide of second painting of Mary with SECOND HALF OF POEM)

And she is on trial in the 'tuts' and looks.
She is on trial in the glances and gossip
and, behind hands, proclaimed 'Guilty before God.'
Still her husband chisels and carves
a haven for the day she'll stand, quite still,
with the weight of the world in her arms,
the tip of each infant finger, sweet as a fig, in her lips.
This painting, along with Lindley's poem, conveys what Mary was waiting and preparing
for: her newborn's sweet fleshy fingers reaching out to touch her lips.

In a book called "Creating with God" Sarah Jobe talks about the holy and confusing blessedness of pregnancy, which may give us insight into how Mary felt. She says, "Waiting for my coming daughter meant learning to live with a driving desire for a relief from the pain of pregnancy and the anticipate pain of labor. I desired to meet the little person who had so radically changed my life, and desired the start of the new life I would have with her. Waiting for a child meant waiting for the fulfillment of a promised blessing I didn't deserve and a coming burden I couldn't imagine."

How are we preparing a place?

Let us listen to our hymn and imagine how we will welcome Jesus into our world this Christmas season.

Perform Welcome to our world

Welcoming Christ into our world was not just for Mary before Jesus was born or for John before Christ started his ministry. Each year we, followers of Christ, are reminded that we too prepare a place for Jesus to be born to us anew.