

2025 Advent 2 Small Group Guide

Preparing the Way: The Message of John the Baptist

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, You who called John the Baptist from the wilderness to prepare your people—open our hearts to the transforming power of repentance. Remove every obstacle that keeps us from receiving Christ with joy, humility, and obedience. Shape our community and our lives to reflect your coming Kingdom. Amen.

Icebreaker Question

John the Baptist confronted people with hard truths because he believed real transformation was possible. **Share a Christmas movie, story, or tradition that—beneath the nostalgia—actually reveals a deeper truth about transformation, generosity, or repentance.**

What gospel theme do you see hidden inside it?

Sermon Overview

This week's sermon focused on **John the Baptist—the forerunner of Christ**, a prophet shaped not by the palace but by the wilderness (cf. Luke 1; Matthew 3). Raised in the spiritual environment of **Qumran**, a community committed to purity, Scripture, and end-time expectation, John enters the Judean wilderness with a message still urgent today: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

This repentance is not mere remorse. It is **metanoia**—a total reorientation of life, values, and priorities (Matt. 3:2). John warns against "cheap grace," the illusion that we can claim God's forgiveness without entering God's way of life (cf. Isaiah 1:10–17; James 2:14–17).

John insists that the **fruit of repentance** must show up in our treatment of others—especially the poor, marginalized, and forgotten (Luke 3:10–14).

This theme echoes the transformation seen in our beloved Christmas stories: Scrooge, the Grinch, and St. Nicholas himself. Each narrative reveals that **true change radiates outward in compassion, generosity, and justice**.

John's ministry challenges us to prepare our hearts not only for Christmas but also for the return of Christ—living lives marked by shalom, justice, and holy expectation.

Key Takeaways

1. **John's message is rooted in holiness and urgency.** John stands in the prophetic tradition calling God's people to repentance now (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1). His call confronts complacency and invites transformation.
2. **Repentance means turning, not merely feeling.** Metanoia means a deep reorientation of heart and lifestyle (Luke 3:8). John rejects "cheap grace" — forgiveness without obedience.

3. **The fruit of repentance is social, not only personal.** Sharing coats, food, resources (Luke 3:10–11) reflects God’s heart for justice (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 58:6–10). Repentance restores not only the individual but the community.
4. **Wilderness forms disciples.** John’s formation at Qumran highlights the discipline, Scripture-saturation, and spiritual clarity born in solitude (cf. Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). God often prepares us in wilderness seasons.
5. **Transformation precedes proclamation.** Just as Scrooge and the Grinch learned, true repentance leads to changed behavior, generosity, and joyful participation in God’s work.

Discussion Questions

Part 1: Understanding John’s Message (15–20 minutes)

1. **What stood out to you most about John the Baptist’s background and preparation for ministry?**
How does knowing about his possible upbringing among the Qumran community deepen your understanding of his call to repentance and preparation in the wilderness?
2. **John called the crowds a “brood of vipers” (Luke 3:7), even though they came to be baptized.**
Why do you think he used such strong language?
What dangers was he warning them about—externally and internally?
3. **The sermon mentioned the danger of “cheap grace.”**
What does this phrase mean in a biblical sense (cf. Matthew 3:8; James 2:17)?
How might modern Christians be tempted to pursue forgiveness without transformation?

Part 2: Fruits of Repentance (20 minutes)

1. **John taught that repentance produces generosity and compassion (Luke 3:10–11).**
Why do you think Scripture consistently connects repentance with justice, mercy, and care for the vulnerable?
2. **The sermon linked repentance to transformation stories like Scrooge, the Grinch, and St. Nicholas.**
What spiritual truths do these stories reveal about changed hearts?
How do they mirror the gospel theme of metanoia?
3. **If John the Baptist were speaking to our culture today,**
what specific examples of “fruit” might he call Christians—individually and collectively—to demonstrate?
How might that challenge holiday patterns of consumption, comfort, or busyness?

Part 3: Repentance as Preparing the Way (15–20 minutes)

1. **John’s message was communal as well as personal.**
In Scripture, entire groups—crowds, soldiers, tax collectors—are confronted and invited to repent.

What would it look like for a *community* to “prepare the way of the Lord”?
Where do you see systems or shared habits that need corporate repentance?

2. **The sermon taught repentance as metanoia—a complete change of direction.**

Where might God be calling West Lawn Church to turn toward new practices that reflect God’s Kingdom? What old habits or assumptions must be turned *from*?

3. **Biblical revival often begins with community repentance (Jonah 3; 2 Kings 22–23; Acts 2).**

What signs indicate that a church, community, or family is experiencing genuine repentance and renewal?

Take-Home Personal Reflections

- Where am I being called to “prepare the way” in my own life this Advent?
- In what areas am I only seeking forgiveness rather than true transformation?
- What one step of repentance—turning toward God—might I take this week?

Looking Ahead

This week, continue watching for:

- **Where repentance leads to renewed life**
- **Where generosity heals broken places**
- **Where God may be calling our church to turn**
- **Where the Kingdom breaks into ordinary moments**

And practice one concrete act of repentance that prepares your heart for Christ.