2 Advent C 2025

 The opening sentence of today’s Gospel cuts two ways. On one level, St Luke historically dates a significant event. He names the ruling parties, beginning with the Roman overlords, proceeding to Jewish rulers, and finally acknowledging Temple authorities. Hierarchical protocol. We know the time and place of John the Baptist by finding him in the context of the major players of the day.

 On another level, it is a scathing theological judgment on the Roman and Jewish political leadership and the religious establishment. The Word of God has bypassed them all. The political and religious leaders are anointed to be mediations of divine power. Earthly authority participates in divine authority. But the Word of God is not heard and welcomed in palaces or the temple. Instead, it searches out a contemplative-turned-social activist who is also a prophet. The Word finds him in the desert, a place of purification and inner scrutiny, far from the machinations of power.

 St John proclaims “*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,*” the intricacies of inner change, a “going beyond the mind,” letting go of sin, the necessary work of preparation. John borrows the language of Isaiah, and sees himself as a construction worker, building a highway for the arrival of the Lord. Whatever the obstacle, it will be removed. If the road is winding, it will be straightened. If it is rough, it will be smoothed. If a mountain is in the way, it will be flattened. If a valley slows travel time, it will be filled into a flat surface. Here is a man on mission.

 What mission are we on? Do we have a mission? Jesus’ baptism gives us a symbolic answer. St Luke tells us, when Jesus comes out of the water, He prays. In prayer, the sky opens, the Spirit as a dove descends, and the heavenly voice affirms: *“You are my Son, the Beloved; with You I am well pleased.”* This is the goal of the going beyond the mind and forgiveness of sins. It readies the baptized person to hear the transcendent word of love. Without the forgiveness of sins, we remain blind and deaf to the Holy Spirit and the voice of the Father. John’s highway is ultimately a way to let God get close, to make it possible to welcome Jesus as the Giver of the Spirit.

 The path is made clear. The day of Justice is coming. Jesus, God’s justice, the only kind that brings security. This is God’s promise. We look for His coming who will bring justice and peace. He will guide the peoples of nations to communion and care for the afflicted and discarded. The Spirit of the Lord rests on Him and those who follow and imitate Him.

 John the Baptist as His herald, cries out to us to be ready and prepare the way for the Incarnation—His birth into our lives in Word, in Eucharist, in peace on earth and justice for the poor. We have been baptized for conversion and in water and the Spirit. We have been forgiven, blessed, and made children of God with His beloved child, Jesus. Are we ready?

 We are summoned to rejoice and dress in the splendor of God’s glory, wrapping ourselves in the cloak of justice, bearing the miter of God’s eternal name. It is time to stand, gathered, rejoicing at the Word of the Holy One. We are embraced with the justice and mercy of God.

