

Text: Matthew 3:1-12

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew, chapter three verses one through twelve.

Boys and girls, I pray that you are doing well today as we gather around our Lord and His word today to receive His wondrous blessings. Do you know what I have here? I have a piece of fruit, where did this fruit come from? Yep, it came from the store but before that it came from a tree. This tree was a good tree because it produced good fruit. This fruit is tasty and good for you. Yet, there are trees that produce fruit that is wormy, not good tasting or good for you. These are bad trees. In our text for today, John the Baptist says to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. How do we produce fruit in keeping with repentance? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

For one preparing the way of the Lord, The words of the Baptist sound anything but loving. “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” How’s that for a hello greeting? John the Baptist is harsh and seemingly unloving. He is this way because there is no time for nice pleasantries and warm greetings. People need to wake up and wake up now to the seriousness of their sins. There is no more time to delay lest they delay too long and are utterly and completely destroyed. “Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Do we take our sins so seriously? Many times we are tempted to take our sins lightly. We think, “I’m not really all that bad of a person in comparison to Joe over there. He’s much worse than I am.” We fall into the temptation that just because everyone sins that our own sins are okay to do. After all, everyone does it so it must be right and proper to do. It’s okay to tell a little white lie to your spouse that she looks as beautiful as the day you met. That’s far easier, and safer, than telling the truth that she has put on a few pounds. It’s easier to

blame the car for breaking down rather than your own ineptitude and putting off getting it repaired sooner. It's ok to disobey those in authority over you, they do not know what they are talking about anyways. Satan even tempts us to believe that God is not all-seeing with the lies that it's only you in the room in the dark, whose going to know? It's only a thought, a thought never hurt anyone right? It's easy for us to be bad trees bearing bad fruit. John the Baptist rightly includes us when he says, "You brood of vipers!" We are corrupt, sinful, and unclean by our very nature in our thoughts, our words, our and deeds.

As sinful as we are, as unclean as we are, producing nothing but rotten fruit by our very nature, how can we then bear good fruit? The Baptist gives us the answer, "in keeping with repentance." We repent. We turn away from our sin, from the horrible things that we do. That we think, that we say. We war against our sinful flesh, not gratifying it's desires. Rather instead, we turn to the One who produces nothing but good and perfect fruit, John's cousin according to the flesh, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through Christ, God Himself takes on every single one of our sins and lives a perfect life in our place. Jesus is the spotless Lamb without blemish. He even goes to the cross, bearing our sins. There, bleeding, suffering, and dying, He bears the full wrath of God in our place. He does not escape the wrath to come, nor does He flee from it. Rather, He hangs there, bearing it fully for us, in our place. Rising again from the dead, Jesus gives to us newness of life. Through Water and the Word in Holy Baptism, He gives us of His Holy Spirit. Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and with fire that we can escape the coming judgement, solely by His death and resurrection, not because of anything that we ourselves have done.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can bear fruit in keeping with repentance. We gratify not the desires of our flesh, but seek to gratify God above all else, as shown in our daily lives. We strive to live according to His commandments in how we treat those around us, we focus our thoughts, words, and deeds on heavenly things rather than on earthly things. This means that we take our sins, no matter how small the devil may try to make them seem, and treat them as seriously as they deserve. We call out sin for what it is, a violating of God's holy and just Law. We warn others when they

engage in sinful actions. We do this, not because we are perfect. Not because we are better than anyone else, but because we know that the time is short for repentance, and we, who have been forgiven much by the blood of Jesus, desire that they too bear fruit in keeping with repentance, turning from their sinful ways, and live before it is too late and the tree is cut down and thrown into the fire.

My dear beloved flock, bear fruit in keeping with repentance, turning away from your sins and looking to the cross, there seeing Christ Jesus and Him Crucified, bearing your sins in your place, to give you life everlasting instead of just condemnation.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.