

Christmas is around the corner; people are busy making plans and Children are making gift lists. Sure, why not, it is Christmas, the best season of the year.

But always around this time we have this man in our sermon: John the Baptist: the representative harsh, uncompromising, weird preacher of all times.

“You brood of vipers!”—we know this was the beginning of his sermon. And I wonder how many of you would come to church if the good news of the Gospel we want to hear has to start with this unpleasant phrase.

But strange! Very strange! People came; not just people, Luke says, John was speaking to “crowds” — *he is using* the plural word. If you read Mark 1:5, it says: “people from the whole Judean countryside and ALL the people of Jerusalem were going out to him.”

So you can picture how many people we are talking about; we are talking about a sea of people.

I am sure some of them went out there just to see; but most of them knew why they were there;

they wanted to hear this prophet preach; they wanted to hear what God was telling them through this voice in the wilderness; it had been several hundred years for the nation to hear a prophet; so they came; they came; and they came.

But here is the message: You brood of vipers! You children of snakes!

Boy, who’s gonna like it? Who wants to hear this kind of curse!

But it was the opposite; people heard a trembling living voice of God in that verdict. People did not turn their back; instead, they came closer to him; people did not throw a stone at him; they rather came kneeling beating their breast and said, “Sir, what should we do?”

What should we do; what should we do!

My guess is that John had all the charisma; and he had no time for any introductory words; he did not need any rhetorical techniques to win his audience's attention.

He just went right into his message!

"You brood of vipers!" Who told you that you could get away from God's impending judgment; you know who you are, you know what you've done, and God knows too!

But strange, Luke says, all the people who heard this message took it to their hearts and truly wanted to know what they should do on their part. So they accepted John's invitation to be baptized in the water as a sign of repentance, as a sign of new beginning, as a sign of their resolution that they want to live a different life.

So, through John, they humbly came before God and repented of their shortcomings, their clod hearts, and their short-sighted selfish lives.

"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise," John said.

"The Lord is near; get ready!" He said.

"You need to bear fruits, good fruits; otherwise you will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Do what is right; repent; you need to clear your mess in your life.

He is coming; get ready!

The valleys need to be filled in and the mountains need to come down; get your life straightened out.

As one commentator says, "For John the Baptist, the bad news is good news, and the good news only sneaks in on the shoulders of the bad."

The movie 2012: went to see it last week;

They scare people with threats of earthquakes and Tsunamis....

The core of Earth begins heating up plunging the world into chaos: California falls into the Pacific Ocean, the eruption of the Yellowstone National Park, massive earthquakes, and Mega-Tsunamis etc.

They said there is one way to survive this disaster: get on the ships in Mt. Himalayas. The problem is who has the tickets to get on the ships? Some rich people and people with power...of course, there was struggle too.

It is just a Hollywood movie; I was just curious about the movie and I wanted to see how they would handle this topic; and I was disappointed; but I was not surprised.

I don't know what they are trying to do with this movie; people are already scared in this economy; but, to me, they try to make people more scared and frustrated.

But the biblical message is always full of hope; it doesn't just scare people; there are moments we are given strong warnings and even punishments.

But there is always the light of hope, the light of salvation, the light of God's redemption. That's what the Gospel is about.

If you read the book of Zephaniah, it is full of warnings and sharp criticisms against the people of Judah because they were not living up to their covenant with God.

For instance 1:2 says: "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the Lord." And if you read further, you will find the same kind of words continues....

But as we heard from 3:14-20, the book with a beautiful song of comfort and praise.

Christmas is coming; the Lord is coming; while the Good News of God's salvation has always been available to us, it will be unfolding to us in a fresh way through this Christmas.

But the Good News cannot be experienced as good unless we go

through this bad news; the bad news of God's warning and our need for repentance of our weaknesses and shortcomings.

It is only when we pass through the "dark night of the soul" that we are finally ready for dawn, aching for its energies to transform ourselves and the world we live in.

John the Baptist is here with us; without hesitation, he is spitting out his words to the people in front of him and us, "You brood of vipers!"

I don't know about you. To me, it sounds like a double-edged sword that penetrates through my heart; and I know that I need it.

I feel that John's message will rather bring me closer to God.

So at this moment, I feel like I am there at the edge of Jordan River waiting for my turn for the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

On the verge of Christmas, I also want you to meet John the Baptist first before you ever want to see Santa Clause; I also want you to go there with me at the Jordan River.

I need the Lord; I need His presence; I need His comfort; I need His strength; I need His guidance; and I need His light.

For that, I need to cleanse myself; I need to empty myself; I need to get things straightened out before He is here. Everyone there said, "What should we do?" "What should we do?"

But I think I already know what I should do. What about you?

I hope this is the case with you.