



Luke 1:57-66  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent  
Preparing for Jesus

Rev. Brian North  
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*(This is the 12/24 morning sermon, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent; Christmas Eve services had a different message, also available to read.)*

Before every airline flight, there are a series of things that happen in preparation for the flight. Some of them happen kind of behind the scenes (running luggage through those machines that smashes it, etc.)...but other preparations happen when the flight attendants go through their speech right before the upcoming flight. It's a way of preparing the passengers for a safe and enjoyable flight. They say things like:

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have on our flight today someone who is taking his first flight on his 80th birthday: Please give a round of applause for your captain. For those of you travelling with your children – why? And for those of you that are travelling with two of your children, what in the world were you thinking? In the event of a drop in cabin pressure please put on your own oxygen mask first and then assist your child and then your husband as well. If you don't want to assist the child, or your husband, it's okay, we will not judge you. To activate oxygen, simply insert 75 cents for the first minute. Even though the small bag may not inflate you are receiving lots of gin, oxygen that is. If you look above you'll see some buttons. The yellow button is your reading light. Please don't press the orange button unless you absolutely have to. The orange button is your ejector seat button.”

“In the unlikely event of a water landing, just think of the incredible story you'll be able to tell your grandchildren. Your seat cushions can be used for flotation. In the event of an emergency water landing please take them with our compliments. You can also use these yellow lifejackets. If we land near a hot tub, just think of it as your own teeny-weeny yellow Southwest bikini. Just put it on, pull the strings, and it will inflate. If your life vest does not inflate your life vest is broken. Oops. So sorry.

“No smoking is allowed, not even in the toilets. Don't be naughty in our potty. If you do there is a \$2,000 fine, and if you had that kind of money

you'd be flying United instead of Southwest.”

And then the captain will usually say something like this:

“Hi, I’m Captain Amanda Smith. Yes, I’m a female pilot and as a benefit if we get lost on the way I won’t be afraid to stop and ask for directions. For those of you wondering about the weather at our destination, Honolulu is reporting sunny skies and temperatures of 86 degrees. Unfortunately our destination is Nome, Alaska, which is reporting 27 degrees below zero and blowing snow. Today’s flight should take about 3 hours, but luckily I know a shortcut so we might be a little early. We will be taking off just as soon I get through page 10 of this flight manual. Now, sit back, relax and enjoy your flight. Flight attendants prepare for blast off.”<sup>i</sup>

So, preparation before a flight is important. Preparation at Christmas is important, too: How many of you have been preparing for Christmas - buying gifts, putting up Christmas trees, going to Christmas parties, and so forth? Now, wait a minute, not all of you have your hands up, and Christmas is tomorrow! Surely you're not lying – in church! - are you? So, in our household, we've been preparing for Christmas for a few weeks now, at least. And with kids in the home, I realize how big of a deal Christmas is to them.

**Kids anticipate and prepare for Christmas with much more vim and vigor than we adults.** If my kids were in charge of decorating the house, for example, ours would probably look like this: (World-famous [truly] “Hawk House” in Kirkland)



It's not that we adults don't anticipate and love Christmas and all that it stands for in our faith...But kids *love* Christmas. And not just because of the lights, gifts, and stockings, and all that stuff. They are also enamored with the baby Jesus and celebrating his birth. So Christmas is just a joy to celebrate, especially with children, even as we prepare for it.

So, preparation is important. And if you haven’t prepared for Christmas, there’s not much time left. Fortunately, Jesus comes to us new every day. As

Scripture says, “God’s mercies are new every morning.” **So there’s a constant opportunity for us to prepare our hearts for what God is doing and going to do in us...and also through us to touch someone else’s life with the love of God in Christ.**

And so I have been thinking about Christmas, and children, and this theme of preparation...and I want to tie them together this morning, because as we get closer to Christmas, we prepare *ourselves* for it, but we also have a huge responsibility to prepare others for it as well – perhaps especially the children in our lives, such as our children, grandchildren, the children in our church, and so forth. And preparing people is what John the Baptist did, whom we read about in this passage. Now, John didn't prepare people for the *birth* of Jesus Christ, but John prepared people for the *ministry* of Jesus Christ. He prepared people for what God was about to do in their midst as Jesus stepped into the public eye as teacher, preacher, healer, and Savior.

In fact, that's the answer to the question in this morning's Scripture passage, where people asked, **“What is he [John] going to be?” (Luke 1:66).** Luke chapter 3 gives us the answer, where we’re told about John out in the wilderness, with people flocking to him as he prepared people for God in their midst. And similarly, we have that same responsibility to prepare the way for God in our midst, as well as with others, including the children in our lives. The ways we come into contact with children are many. And we can prepare them to know God in their lives, just as John prepared the people for God in their lives as well.

And it's not just a preparation we make for the baby Jesus. Like John the Baptist, we prepare ourselves and others for the grown up Jesus and his ministry to us as well, because Jesus didn't stay a baby. He didn't remain a child. He grew up and demonstrated God in our midst and still does today, if we're prepared to receive him. In fact, Luke 2:52 says that **“Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and people” (Luke 2:52).** Jesus' own parents prepared him well for life as he grew in these four ways: wisdom, stature, and in relationship with God and with people. So we see here the ways we can prepare children – as well as ourselves – to grow in maturity in life and in faith. I want to look at this briefly, and then we’ll return to John.

**First, we see that Jesus grew in wisdom.** He grew in his understanding of the world and in his intellect. Do you know who's responsibility that was to help him grow in this way? Primarily, his parents – Mary and Joseph. And it's no different for us parental types today. We have an awesome responsibility when it comes to preparing kids intellectually to be adults. And it starts in our homes, in our relationships with our kids. Ask any teacher or school administrator what the number one factor is in how well a child does in school, and they will tell you that the home environment is it. What is the relationship between the parents and the children like? Is it good? Is there a relationship? Do the parents interact with the child, work with them on their schoolwork, love them, discipline them, care for them, play with them? Do we parents talk to our children? A study from a few years ago showed that having conversations with young children was up to six times more effective than simply reading books to them when it comes to their language development.<sup>ii</sup> And don't even think of the television as an option: it was of no use. It's not that they can never watch t.v., or that we shouldn't read bedtime stories and so forth, but let's talk with the children in our lives and interact with them. The home environment is crucial to growing in wisdom. And we parents – and other adults in the lives of children – have the greatest impact on their intellectual growth.

**Second, Jesus grew in stature.** He grew physically – this doesn't mean “stature in the community” because that's the third item. This is his physical growth. So, he was well-nourished. They gave him Wheaties instead of fruit loops and sugar bombs for breakfast so his body got the nutrition it needed to grow healthy. His parents didn't let him sit around on the couch all day watching television or playing video games. He got his exercise. They made sure he got a good night's rest. All of these factors contribute to a child's physical stature and their physical growth. And who is responsible for that? The parents or other adults in the lives of children. It's how we prepare them to be physically healthy adults. I hope we are all preparing our children well when it comes to their physical health.

**Third, Jesus grew in favor with people.** His parents raised him to have healthy social relationships with other people. They taught him to respect women, rather than treating them as objects – something it sounds like we

need to re-learn in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. They didn't let the influences of his peers or the social networking of Facebook or Instagram negatively impact him and shape his views of what it means to be human and how to interact appropriately with people. I'm not saying those things are all bad...but kids don't usually know what's good for them and what's not. That's why children have parents and other parental figures, to help them sort through that stuff. They need someone to help them figure it all out. Jesus' parents probably knew who his friends were and who he hung out with at school and how they talked and what they talked about and what they did together. So Jesus grew in favor with people because he knew how to treat them with love, dignity and respect, and that started as a child. We have the responsibility to teach our children the same values.

**Fourth, Jesus grew in favor with God.** In other words, his relationship with his heavenly father grew. Yes, Jesus was fully divine as well as fully human. The Bible teaches us this. But I don't think that means that when he was 6 months old He had a fully mature relationship with His Heavenly Father. Part of his being fully human means growing and learning just as any other human does. So there was growth in his intellect, and also in his relationship with his heavenly father. His spiritual journey of faith, as a human being, grew. And you know who has the primary responsibility for training a child up in the ways of the Lord? The parents. (Notice the trend going on here about the role of the parents?) Much like a school aids parents in raising their kids in wisdom, the church simply comes alongside the parents and aids them in raising their kids to know God in their lives. We're preparing them for a lifetime of following Jesus Christ, and that is the most awesome responsibility we have.

Deuteronomy 6 gives us some good advice on preparing our kids to know God in their adult lives: **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).** When should we teach kids about God? All the time. We have the responsibility of preparing our children to love God with all they've got for all their lives. No

one else will do that for you. So Jesus is a model of what it means to prepare a child to grow in all facets of life so they'll be mature in their adult years.

Now, all this preparation for children to grow into maturity in life and faith begs a question: Are *we* prepared to do that? Are we prepared to live out those verses in Deuteronomy and help our kids and grandkids, and kids in our church, to grow up? Are we even really grown up? I realize I stand here as a 44 year old who certainly isn't totally grown up – Gwen says sometimes I'm the fifth child in the family. So I don't stand here as one who has achieved perfect maturity at all. But there should still be some growth and maturing along the way, so we're prepared to lead others. So, are we grown up? Do we have a right relationship with God? Are we modeling for the kids in our lives what it means to be an adult, live responsibly and with wisdom, live in right relationships with people and with God? Are we showing them with our very lives what it means to be an adult disciple of Jesus Christ in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America? How many of us have ever said to our kids, “Do as I say, not as I do”? I've said that before and I regretted it the moment it started coming out of my mouth. I've wanted to take the words back. That is not a good way to prepare kids to grow up. **So in order to prepare the way for them, our own lives have to be well-prepared first.**

That's why John the Baptist and his message is so important. When he was born, everyone asked, “What then is this child going to be?” Don't we all wonder that about the children in our lives? Every parent asks this question. And obviously, his parents did a great job of raising him and preparing him to know God, because of what we read in Luke 3 where we see that John prepared the way for Jesus Christ. He preached messages that convicted people of their sin and opened them up to the grace of God. He preached of one who was coming who was greater than he, as he prepared the way for Jesus to step into the public spotlight and minister to people and demonstrate the love, grace, and truth of God. **John prepared people for Jesus Christ, and he pointed people to Christ.** As he said to one guy while pointing at Jesus: “Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” He prepared people to be ready for a change, a new thing, that God was going to be doing in their midst. And so John the Baptist and his message of “prepare the way for the work of the Lord” is so important for us to see and hear,

because: If we're going to prepare the way for God in other people's lives – such as our children, or anyone else in our lives – the way has to be prepared for God in our lives first. Airlines apply this same principle to that safety preparation message when they say, “adults put on your own oxygen mask first before helping any children traveling with you.” Our hearts have to be prepared and open and growing in what God is doing in and around us before we can prepare someone else to know God in their lives – whether they're children or adults...people in our homes, in our church, our neighborhood, or anywhere else.

So let's be prepared – not just for Christmas, but for what God is doing in our lives, and let's help others be prepared for what God is doing in their lives as well. And just as a flight attendant goes through those preparatory statements prior to a flight, the preparation is just that: it's preparation. Eventually, the plane actually blasts off...I mean, takes off. And if we're well-prepared, and if the people around us are well-prepared, then the Lord will lift us up like on wings of eagles and bring us to places of faith we never could have imagined. May that be so for you this Christmas and beyond. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup>I'm not smart enough or funny enough to come up with these on my own. There are some videos online that show flight attendants saying some of these things, including some of the ones I used here, though I got them from: <http://flightsandfrustration.com/100-flight-attendant-funny-announcements/>, except for one that I augmented based on my own recollection of a time or two I heard this kind of presentation on flights I was taking.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/5706629/Reading-bedtime-stories-to-children-less-effective-than-conversation.html>