**Make Straight the way of the lord**

## Receive the Word of Hope.

Jesus is God the Father with us in human form.

## Receive the Word of Peace

Jesus is God the Son who makes Peace with sin and death by suffering like us and dying like us.

## Receive the Word of Joy

Jesus is God the Holy Spirit who delivers us from evil and our fear filled temptations.

## Receive the Word of Love

Jesus suffers like us. Jesus dies like us. Jesus rises to new life. The New Way of Life is patience, kindness, generosity, and discovering the power of not insisting on our way.

Worship at home

God the Father | God the Son | God the Holy Spirit

Chapter 5

**Sunday, DECEMBER 27**

**THE CHRIST CANDLE**

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Advent means we watch and wait for Christ’s coming. Christ comes to give us Hope, Peace, and Joy. God, the Father, gives us Hope. God, the Son, gives us Peace. God, the Holy Spirit, gives us Joy. When a body like ours receives Hope, Peace, and Joy it overflows with Love.

Many seek Love. Few find Love. Repentance makes straight the way of the Lord of Love. Repentance means we face the current disturbances of life by receiving Hope, Peace, and Joy. Only then will our neighbors know us by Christ’s Love.


## Make Straight the Way of the Lord!

Medical science knows that every breath holds three movements. When we breath in, our bodies make cortisol. When we exhale, our bodies make oxytocin. The balance of cortisol and oxytocin maintains our sense of peace.

Spiritually this same balance is experienced as fear and faith. Fear leads us into survival mode. Faith leads us into salvation!

The Way of the Lord is Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Picking one is like holding your breath. It is like choosing faith while remaining paralyzed in fear.

Religious leaders mean well. We constantly ask, “Will you be good enough to get into heaven.”

Jesus teaches his disciples to bring heaven to earth through God’s will.

Receiving Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love Worship God and bring heaven to earth. Let’s prepare this Way of the Lord in 2021.

Blessed are the merciful, for they prepare the way of the Lord with Hope, Peace, and Joy. Through these the Body of Christ, the Church, makes God’s Love known.

This week speak with loved one about today’s disturbances. To whom is Good calling you to share the mercy of Christ’s Hope, Peace, and Joy?



**ENCORE: “MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD”**

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2**and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” **3**This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
    make straight paths for him.’”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%203&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23196a)]

**4**John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. **5**People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. **6**Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

**7**But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8**Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. **9**And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. **10**The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

**11**“I baptize you with[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%203&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23204b)] water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%203&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23204c)] the Holy Spirit and fire. **12**His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Make Straight the Way of the Lord

Most Church folk know about Moses and the Burning Bush. Do you remember God’s purpose in sending Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt.? Moses led God’s children into the Wilderness of Sin for one purpose. Listen like Moses and hear God’s purpose. “And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’ (Exodus 3:12.) Friends, God’s purpose is the same today as it was in Moses’ day. God delivers us from Sin to experience the healing power of Worship.

We know that sin separates us from God. When shall we experience Worship that unites us with God, the Father, through Jesus, the Son, even as we are led through the cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit?

 John the Baptist vividly describes the Wilderness of Sin in terms of a farmer gathering the harvest. In the hands of a farmer the winnowing folk is a tool that separates the fruit from the chaff. The fruit is stored in the barns. The chaff is burned.

So, it is with us. This is the Way of the Lord! We come into the wilderness “confessing (our) sins”. Sin is like chaff. The Prophets often speak of God’s people suffering hard hearts that cannot hear God’s Word or see God’s ways.

Marty was a junior at Seymour High School. I met him through mutual friends who came for a visit when I lived at Hilton Head Island. Marty had never been to the beach. After a great day of sand, sun, and water, we discovered that Marty had never eaten shrimp.

We cooked Low Country Boil that evening for dinner. Marty talked about how great the potatoes, corn on the cob, and Polish sausage tasted. Brian stopped chewing long enough to ask, “Do you like the shrimp?” Marty said, “It is not my favorite. Why is it so crunchy?” At same time everyone at the table said, “What, do you not know to peel them first?”

Every sin is like shrimp, peanuts, pistachios, and sunflowers. Sin has a hard, foul tasting shell! I am convinced the Church tells people to believe in Jesus’ Love. (John 3:16) We teach people to confess their sin. Looking and listening to the Church I am convinced We have failed to teach one another how to peel sin away to reveal God’s love to taste God’s fruitfulness!

Look at the Structure of the Great Commandment. It has three parts. God’s love is revealed in our hearts, souls, and minds. Imagine, for a moment, that the Great Commandment is like a shrimp, peanut, pistachio, or sunflower seed. Look, God’s love is the fruit contained in the soul Jesus saves. The heart and mind are like hard outer layers like a shell. Have we taught people to confess their sin, throw the fruit away, and eat the hard, bitter, foul shell?

The hard, bitter, foul, shell tastes like anger, hate, and divisions. It feels like shame, guilt, and blame. It looks like people fighting one another, playing dead, and running away. When it permeates culture, community, nation, and world we look like John the Baptist’s apocalyptic vision! “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8**Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”

Speaking of the coming wrath! Have we never seen or heard God exposing our wrathful ways through the Cross were Jesus suffered as we suffer, physically dies as we die, and rising to life eternal?

Why have so many Bible teachers and preachers missed John the Baptist’s image of Jesus coming with “His winnowing fork… in his hand,… clearing his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Friends, our soul is God’s barn. The soul receives the fruit of God’s Love. The heart and mind’s obsession with judgement, condemnation, or proving self to be right and good is chaff. The Law and the Prophets were given Words of Hope. Jesus is the Word of Peace with Sin and Death. The Holy Spirit is our Joy of being One in Christ. This is the Wilderness Journey that prepares the way to experience that God is Love!

We put a man on the moon but cannot make a moon or hang it in the heavens. We split atoms, destroy cities, and win wars, but we cannot put our broken troops back together again. We grow an economy, build palatial houses, and fund social programs, but no amount of money, buildings, or programs will ever put an end to suffering. The Kingdom of Heaven is made of people!

When will we let God save us from our hearts and minds? When will our suffering be a sign that Christ is with us? When will we have ears to hear the might rushing wind of the winnowing fork as it threshes the harvest? When shall we have eyes to see the sin as chaff? When will we teach our children their soul is God’s barn filled to overflowing with God’s Love?

Come, Christ Jesus, gather us together. Give us eyes to see our sanctuaries transformed into Threshing Floors. Come, Holy Spirit, rend our hearts and minds like chaff being peeled away from the fruit to expose your Love. Come, Holy Fire, consume the Chaff we call Sin. Baptize us in fire until we have pure hearts that have eyes to see Holy God. Cleanse us until we have eyes to see our neighbors seeking your way through the Wilderness of Sin. Rend our hearts and minds until we have ears to hear our neighbors cries as hunger and thirst for righteous Love. Amen.

## Tithes and Offerings

Many in leadership feared the Pandemic would bring TUMC to its financial knees. You have proven again and again how much you value Trinity’s physical presence in Big Stone Gap. We enter 2021 with money in the bank.

Please take a moment to audit your soul! Look at the balance of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love on deposit. To conserve Spiritual things, we give them to anyone willing to receive. Giving Spiritual gifts multiples them. As Jesus says, to those faithful in little even more will be given!

Finances maintain our Physical presence in Wise County. Prayerful consider making a pledge to make straight the way of the Lord by giving Hope, Peace, Joy and Love to your family, neighbors, and enemies! When we are known by our Love the Body of Christ grows.

## Benediction

 Advent makes straight the way of the Lord. Watching and waiting for the Coming Christ is our way of Life. Christ is coming to a heart, soul, and mind near you.

Yes, we will have in person worship services as often as possible. When it is not possible remember to worship in Spirit and Truth. The truth knows God is Love. The Spirit leads us to receive Christ’s Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. Receiving Christ in his coming is Worship. Amen