John then contrasts his baptism with the baptism of the Lord: "I baptize you with water for repentance… but He who comes after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (v.11) John's baptism prepares the heart for Jesus' arrival. Jesus' baptism transforms the heart through the Holy Spirit.

Finally, John speaks of the fire of purification: The Lord gathers wheat—those who turn toward Him with sincere repentance—into His kingdom, and He separates the chaff—lives that refuse God's renewal—not because they were afraid, but because they never turned toward God. (v.12)

5. Conclusion

As Christmas approaches, we joyfully welcome Jesus who came to us in human form. And the same is true of Jesus' Second Coming. His presence restores all humanity and creation. That is why the kingdom of heaven is not far away—it has already drawn near. Judgment Day is the day when all things are set right under God's will and hypocrisy is removed forever.

As a pastor, I often feel a sense of fear when preparing sermons. I worry that I might distort God's will with my own thoughts. That is why I want to walk this life of faith together with you—seeking humility, rejoicing in the Lord, and preparing our hearts for His coming.

When our hearts are filled with spiritual joy, repentance becomes a joyful turning toward the Lord. Fear is transformed into awe. And through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we receive new life again and again.

During this Advent season, may we welcome the Lord with joy rather than fear. May we look to Him with gladness, wait for His coming, and prepare together. Let us joyfully look forward to the Lord who is coming to us. The kingdom of heaven is near!

Practice (Response)

1. If Jesus came back today, what would you say to Him?

2. Who brings you the greatest joy when you look at them?

3. Have you ever experienced joy through repentance?

Second Sunday of Advent / Matthew 3:1-12 (CEB) / December 7, 2025

Reading (Lectio)

(Matthew 3:1) In those days John the Baptist appeared in the desert of Judea announcing,

(Matthew 3:2) "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!"

(Matthew 3:3) He was the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke when he said: The voice of one shouting in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight."

(Matthew 3:4) John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey.

(Matthew 3:5) People from Jerusalem, throughout Judea, and all around the Jordan River came to him.

(Matthew 3:6) As they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

(Matthew 3:7) Many Pharisees and Sadducees came to be baptized by John. He said to them, "You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon?

(Matthew 3:8) Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives.

(Matthew 3:9) And don't even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham's children from these stones.

(Matthew 3:10) The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire.

(Matthew 3:11) I baptize with water those of you who have changed your hearts and lives. The one who is coming after me is stronger than I am. I'm not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

(Matthew 3:12) The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out."

Don't Be Afraid: Living Faithfully in God's Promise

1. Preface

Last time, we reflected on the faith needed to remain awake until the day Jesus returns. No one knows when that day will come. Therefore, we must keep a balanced Christian life—

staying spiritually alert, showing compassion to those in need of God's love, and continually meditating on God's Word.

Some of you may look forward to Jesus' return with hope. Others may feel some fear when thinking about the Second Coming. Indeed, the words "Judgment Day" and "repentance" can evoke images of destruction and punishment. This is why we sometimes confuse the awe of God's holiness with fear.

So as we wait for the day Jesus returns, what mindset keeps us awake? What kind of heart does Jesus want us to welcome Him? My hope is that today's text will help you see that the Second Coming described in Scripture is meant to touch our hearts warmly, not fearfully.

2. John the Baptist

Today's passage introduces John the Baptist—the first prophet to appear after nearly 400 years of silence following Jeremiah and Isaiah. Because his ministry marks the beginning of Jesus' public work, we can view John as the last prophet of the Old Testament era.

We call him John the Baptist because he baptized Jesus. This naturally raises a question:
"Why did Jesus—the sinless Messiah—receive baptism from John?"

This moment is one of deep humility. Jesus fully steps into human life, identifying Himself with us. By entering the same waters we enter, He sanctifies baptism for us—not because the water itself needed cleansing, but because Jesus dignifies and transforms everything He touches. He did this not to judge the world, but to bring salvation (John 3:17).

If Jesus' only purpose were to end the world with judgment, He would not have needed to be baptized among sinners or form a loving connection with us. Through John the Baptist, God speaks to those who hold fear in their hearts—not to terrify them, but to draw them toward restoration.

3. Here Comes the Kingdom of Heaven

John appears in the Judean wilderness with the word of God (Matthew 3:1). In Scripture, the wilderness symbolizes spiritual barrenness, needing renewal. In that barren place, John proclaims: "Change your hearts and lives! The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (v.2)

The "kingdom of heaven" means that God is actively intervening in human history. John's message is urgent—not because God is eager to punish, but because God is eager to restore. Yet when we hear "repent quickly," we sometimes react with fear: "What if I've committed a sin I don't know about? What if I fail to be saved?"

To help us understand the heart behind this urgency, Matthew reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy: A voice cries out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord!' (Isaiah 40:3) This is not a warning of destruction—it is an invitation to renewal.

John's clothing resembles Elijah's (v.4), symbolizing resistance to corruption and solidarity with the poor. Because of his authenticity, people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and the entire Jordan region flocked to him (v.5). They confessed their sins and were baptized (v.6).

Why did John proclaim that the kingdom was near? Because God's presence restores broken hearts. Why did he call people to repent urgently? Because God's restoration is for all people—regardless of status, wealth, or background.

In verse 6, "sin" refers to turning one's gaze away from God. Repentance means turning our gaze back toward Him. Sin and repentance are not only moral acts—they are directions. John's baptism was not yet Christian baptism. It was preparation—clearing the road for the Lord to come. And how do we prepare that road today? We welcome God's healing work with joy, not fear.

4. Baptism of the Lord

Pharisees and Sadducees also came to be baptized. But John rebuked them: "You children of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" (v.7)

Why such strong words? They came not out of repentance but out of fear, attempting to escape judgment while clinging to religious privilege. They were not turning toward God—they were trying to avoid consequences while keeping their hearts unchanged. This is why John calls them "children of the serpent," not because of fear itself, but because their hearts remained unrepentant.

John says, "Produce fruit worthy of repentance" (v.8). Fear cannot produce fruit; only genuine repentance can. Then he warns them not to rely on ancestry: "Do not say, 'We have Abraham as our father.' God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones." (v.9) Even the Gentiles—whom they often rejected—could become true children of Abraham through repentance and faith.

Then John declares, "The ax is already at the root of the trees." (v.10) God evaluates roots—our connection to Him—not merely outward actions. Trees that bear good fruit are those rooted in a sincere return to God. Trees that refuse to turn to Him, hiding behind hypocrisy or pride, will face judgment. The issue is not fear; it is refusal to repent.