

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020

“PURIFY AND PREPARE”

By Kim Sheard

*[The Pharisees] asked [John the Baptist], “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” ~ John 1:25-27 (NRSV)*

The word baptism is not used in the Old Testament. However, by the time John was performing baptisms in the Jordan River, it seems that everyone understood what he was doing. At least, they did not question it within the stories told about him in the Gospels.

Baptism may originally have just been a modification of Jewish ritual purification that required immersion in water after touching a leper or corpse or otherwise becoming “unclean.” This cleansing was required before they could offer sacrifices at the temple. Purification was also required before converting to Judaism. Given that John’s task was to prepare the way for the Messiah, it would seem that his form of ritual purification was a way to prepare the baptized for the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. His celebration of Advent, Year One!

We all understand that Advent involves cleaning our houses, setting up the Advent wreath and the Christmas tree, and shopping for gifts. But how can we *purify* ourselves as part of our Advent preparations like those Jews that John baptized? Here are some ideas.

- 1) We are cleanest when our sins are forgiven. So we should pray, confess our sins, then accept God’s forgiveness and pledge to do better. Wash, rinse, and repeat, since we can never seem to avoid wrongdoing.
- 2) We can treat our bodies as the temples they are (read 1 Corinthians 6:19). Use this time to practice eating healthy, exercising, getting good sleep—all those things we know are good for our physical health. Consider a short fast or cleanse.
- 3) Take a break (for whatever time period) from screens, or just from news, and read the Bible, meditate, or experience nature instead. Only allow positive input to reach your brain during this time.
- 4) Practice censoring your own mouth and thoughts. How long can you go without saying something negative? When you *think* something negative, purposely remind yourself to think of your child, your pet, a song, or anything you find positive or uplifting instead.

What other ideas do you have for self-purification?

*Thought for Today: Purification should be part of our preparations for Christmas.*