

November 30, 2025 Advent Sunday Worship Sermon
"Preparing for the Lord's Day" Pastor Takaaki Inoue
Malachi 3:19-24, Luke 1:5-20

① **【Keeping the law is separate from faith】**

Today marks the beginning of Advent. The first characters to appear in the Christmas story are Zechariah, a priest, and his wife Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. They were righteous people before God, observing all the Lord's commands and regulations, and were blameless in their faith. However, they had no children, and both were already advanced in years. While Zechariah was burning incense in the sanctuary of the temple, the archangel Gabriel appeared and announced that a child would be given to them. Yet Zechariah could not believe it and was struck dumb. No matter how righteous and blameless a person might be, they could not believe in God's work. This teaches us the limitations of the Law. Keeping the Law and having faith are two separate things. Many people in this world live righteous lives, but that does not mean they all believe in Christ or God. Belief is beyond human power. Zechariah's loss of speech teaches that humans cannot interfere with God's work, neither by word nor deed.

② **【The Importance of Preparation】**

John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the people for Jesus' coming. He was prophesied in the Old Testament book of Malachi, filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, and born with a mission. He was a relative of Jesus, born six months before Him. His mission is described thus: "He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:16-17)

Malachi prophesied: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 3:23) Here it speaks of the prophet Elijah, but this refers to John the Baptist. Though his appearance was different, he was a prophet possessing the same spirit and power as Elijah. The "great and dreadful day of the Lord" is the day when God enters into this world. As it says, "to strike the land with destruction," it is the day of judgment, the day of the final judgment. When Christ first came into this world, He came as a weak man to bear the sins of humanity. But when He comes again, He will come as a mighty one to judge all people. We must prepare ourselves before the Lord's day arrives. This is the meaning of Advent. The preparation John the Baptist proclaimed was repentance. He preached: "Produce fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to

yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able to raise up children of Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3:8-9) In short, it means: Do not think you are special. Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

③ 【Christians Who Bear No Fruit】

The Gospel of John I read recently states: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, so that it may bear more fruit. (John 15:1-2) Jesus is the true vine, and God the Father is the vine-dresser. Being connected to Jesus means being baptized, coming to church to worship, and partaking of the Lord's Supper. It says, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away." Here it is clearly written that connection is not the goal; bearing fruit is the purpose of the Christian life. Being baptized and attending worship are means to bear fruit. What is this fruit? The fruit of the Holy Spirit is first and foremost confessing Jesus as Lord, but it also includes "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). In short, it means becoming like Christ.

So why do some who are baptized and worship fail to bear fruit? As it says, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you" (4, 5), bearing fruit requires the cooperation and work of both my will and Christ's will. Yet it becomes one-sided.

●Once, a believer told me, "I prayed to God, but He didn't do anything for me." Hearing that, I thought to myself: "Didn't He bear my sins, die on the cross, and give me life that never ends through His resurrection?" Could it be that this person doesn't see their own sin? That's why they feel no gratitude for Christ's cross. They desire their own wishes to be granted more than forgiveness of sin or eternal life. I understand, but there are limits to what our desires can be fulfilled. I don't think it's asking too much of Christ to seek more than forgiveness of sins and eternal life. I felt that person harbored resentment toward the God who did not grant their wishes. This is the same as the Jews and the thief on the cross's left. They blame their suffering on those around them or on Christ, never considering their own sin as the cause.

Not only him, but I know several such Christians. When their desires aren't fulfilled, they try to forcefully obtain them. That's the kind of Christian Putin is. They may be baptized and attend worship, but they are believers without the Holy Spirit. They do not understand Christ's love; they only think about being recognized and having their own desires fulfilled. Eventually, they will drift away from public worship. If such a person were to become a church leader, it would be

disastrous. The church would be thrown into chaos, and the believers would scatter. They are using God for their own desires. James spoke of such believers like this: “You kill and covet, yet you cannot obtain. You fight and wage war, yet you do not possess because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 4:2-3) We must pray for resentful Christians, that they may become people who understand God's love.

④ **【What is necessary to bear fruit】**

Those who live a life of faith yet bear no fruit are people who never change. Such individuals think, “I don't need to change.” That's why they don't change and don't seek change. First, you must have the will to change and continually ask Christ for it. Whether it's illness or alcoholism, unless the person themselves wants to be healed, no amount of help from doctors, family, or friends will bring recovery. It's the same as when Jesus asked the man who had been lying by the pool of Bethesda for 38 years, “Do you want to get well?”

● There is a woman named O who attends our heartwarming gatherings. She is scheduled to be baptized soon, and I am always impressed by the words that come from her mouth. Her husband had a mental illness but refused to see a doctor. He subjected the family to constant suffering through violence and verbal abuse. He eventually passed away, and afterward, she began studying mental illness and came to believe she was at fault. It's clear she is trying to find meaning in her painful experiences, never blaming others, and striving earnestly to change herself. Such a person is refreshing to see and encourages those around them. She has also given courage to those leaving cults to be baptized and become Christians. People who strive to change are beautiful, and God's Spirit works in them. That is why they bear fruit.

What does it mean to prepare to welcome Christ the Savior? What is repentance? It is not merely a worldly moral matter of ceasing to do wrong. If one could simply stop, the cross of God's Son would be unnecessary. Repentance is acknowledging one's own powerlessness and having a heart that needs the Savior. It is a broken and contrite spirit that knows it must change and cannot change itself. Such a heart is the preparation most pleasing to God. During this Advent season, let us earnestly desire to change and improve ourselves, and let us continue to pray for this.