

“Are You the One? When Faith Has Questions”

Isaiah 11:1–10; Matthew 3:1–12

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By Rev. Peter Blank

Christmas is everywhere—decorations, music, lights. But under all the sparkle, some of us feel anything but merry. We’re tired, grieving, stretched thin. And somewhere deep down the question surfaces:

“Jesus... are you really the One? Because my life doesn’t look very ‘peace on earth.’”

That question is exactly where Advent lives. It’s not a season for people who have it all together; it’s for people who look at the world and think, “This isn’t how it’s supposed to be.” Isaiah and John the Baptist both speak into that kind of world—and into our questions.

1. When Hope Looks Like a Stump (Isaiah 11)

Isaiah opens with a bleak image:

“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

The royal line of David was supposed to be a strong tree. Instead, Isaiah sees only a stump—cut down, lifeless. Some of us know what that feels like:

a relationship that’s stalled,
a diagnosis that changed everything,
a faith that feels numb instead of alive.

Isaiah doesn’t sugarcoat it. He just says: God isn’t done yet. Out of that dead-looking stump, a tiny green shoot pushes through.

That’s the promise of the Messiah—fragile, small, yet filled with life. And this One, Isaiah says, will be filled with the Spirit of the Lord—wisdom, understanding, power, reverence.

He’ll care for the poor and the meek. He’ll bring justice where it’s missing. And Isaiah imagines a world so healed that wolves and lambs lie down together, children play safely, and creation rests in peace.

It’s a breathtaking picture. But if you’re thinking, “That’s not the world I see,” you’re not wrong. Isaiah’s promise stretches beyond what’s visible. It’s hope with its eyes open.

And Christians dare to say that hope has a name—Jesus.

So we ask the Advent question:

“Jesus, are you really that One? The shoot from the stump, the bringer of peace?”

That question isn’t doubt; it’s faith reaching for something real.

2. When the One Is Closer Than You Think (Matthew 3)

Now we jump to John the Baptist in the wilderness. If Isaiah paints the picture of who is coming, John yells, “Get ready—He’s almost here!” He’s not the cozy Christmas type. He’s wearing camel’s hair, eating locusts, shouting:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Matthew connects him to Isaiah’s prophecy:

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

Crowds come to be baptized, turning from old ways to prepare for the One who's coming. Then the religious leaders arrive—the ones who should be most ready—and John calls them out:

“You brood of vipers! Bear fruit worthy of repentance.”

He's blunt, but he's not cruel. He's saying, “Don't fake preparation. Let it show in your life.” Then come those strong images: the ax at the root, the winnowing fork in hand—urgent, serious language. Not to frighten, but to wake us up.

While we're asking, “Jesus, are you the One?” God is asking, “Are you ready for the One? Have you made room?”

Isaiah says who's coming: a just, Spirit-filled King. John says how to get ready: repentance—turning around.

Repentance isn't about guilt; it's about direction. It's noticing: “The road I'm on doesn't line up with Jesus. Time to turn.” That's what it means to “prepare the way of the Lord.”

3. When Faith Has Questions

What if you hear all this and still don't feel sure? Good. You're in excellent company.

The Bible is full of questioners:

“How long, O Lord?” “Why have you forsaken me?”

And later, this same John the Baptist—after preaching so boldly—will send messengers to ask Jesus,

“Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?”

So if you've ever asked, “Jesus, are You really the One? Do You see what's happening?”—you're not failing at faith. You're living Advent faith: honest, expectant, still preparing the way.

You can pray, “Jesus, I don't have it all figured out, but if You are the One Isaiah promised and John announced, I want to make space for You.”

So how do we do that, practically?

4. Three Simple Ways to Prepare

Let's keep it very simple—three ways this week to “prepare the way.”

1. Clear Some Space

If a king were visiting your house, you'd make room. You'd tidy up. Our December calendars are jammed, and our hearts get the same way.

This week: look at your schedule.

Find one thing—just one—you can cancel or postpone. Use that small pocket of time to meet God.

Read Isaiah 11 or Matthew 3 slowly. Sit in quiet.

Pray something honest: “Jesus, if You are the One, show me where You're growing new life in me.”

Clearing time is a spiritual act. It tells God you're serious about making room.

2. Make a Straight Path in One Relationship

John said, “Bear fruit worthy of repentance.”

One of the best places that fruit grows is in our relationships.

- Is there someone where the path between you is crooked—someone you’ve avoided, resented, or hurt?
- Ask God for one name. Then take one small step: Send a text, make a call, say, “I’m sorry.”
- Or, if direct contact isn’t possible, forgive them quietly and stop rehearsing the old hurt. You might not fix everything, but even that small move clears a path for peace. It’s a way of saying, “Jesus, straighten this road through my pride and fear.”

3. Join the King’s Justice in One Small Way

Isaiah’s Messiah loves the poor and the overlooked.

If Jesus is that King, then preparing for Him means joining His mercy.

This week:

Do one act of kindness for someone in need.

Give to a food pantry. Drop off a meal. Check on a lonely neighbor.

Not as “holiday charity,” but as a living prayer: “Jesus, You care for the vulnerable. Use me, even a little, to make Your love real.” That’s how we prepare the way.

5. Bringing It Home

Some of you are joyful and expectant.

Some are weary or doubtful.

Some look at life and think, “It’s just a stump right now.”

Hear the promise:

- God brings life out of stumps.
- Hope out of what looks dead.
- Peace out of chaos.

John’s rough voice in the wilderness isn’t meant to scare us—it’s meant to awaken us.

“The kingdom of heaven has come near. You can turn. You can make room.”

You don’t have to have all the answers to start preparing the way.

You can say: “Lord, I’m uncertain, but I’ll clear some space.

I’ll make one relationship straighter.

I’ll do one act of mercy. And I’ll trust that somewhere in those small things, You’ll meet me.”

And maybe, as you do, you’ll begin to notice it—a little more peace, a little more courage, a small green shoot of hope. Those are the quiet signs that Jesus really is the One—the shoot from the stump, the bringer of justice and peace, the One who still comes to us, even when faith has questions.

So this Advent, bring Jesus your question: “Jesus, are You the One?”

Then let your life whisper the answer as you prepare the way.

Amen.