

Advent 3 – December 13, 2020
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Our gospel, like last week, again introduces us to the figure John. However, unlike Mark, gone is the title John the Baptist. Nowhere do we find reference to John's apparel (i.e., camel hair and a leather belt) or his diet (i.e., locusts and wild honey). All that is gone and in John's gospel --- John is simply John. His mission and purpose are quickly asserted in the opening verses, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light."

God sent John with the purpose of witnessing to the people regarding the coming of the true light, the very Word who in the beginning was with God and was God. (v.1) John fully embraced the calling in which God had sent him for. Clearly, the message he came to proclaim was being heard as our text tells us the religious leaders sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" After a round of questioning John explains his mission, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" This gospel is intentional on clarifying and giving witness to Jesus' true identity and God sends John to be the primary witness to the light coming into the world. (v.3)

John is continually diverting attention from himself and pointing to Christ. The gospel writer is less interested about John the Baptist, but more interested in John the witness. The text only secondarily tells us John was baptizing when the priests and Levites ask him, "Why then are you baptizing?" John answers that question in verse 31, just following our reading, stating, "I came baptizing [with water] for this reason, that he [i.e., the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world] might be revealed to Israel." And then John testified in verse 32, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me,

‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified this is the Son of God.”

John has seen and testified this is the Son of God. Vision and testimony that has been revealed through the One who sent him into the world and the presence of the Holy Spirit. He has come to witness that the light has come into the world. John was sent by God to be a voice crying out in the wilderness. This was his mission ---- to continually point to Christ and make the people see and believe the one who stood among them whom they did not know.

In this season of Advent, the church speaks a great deal about preparation. Certainly, our society gets prepared for the Christmas season. Stores begin months in advance adorning the shelves with seasonal gifts and decorations. Online retailers begin rolling out daily deals and huge markdowns. Homeowners string lights and put up their Christmas trees. People prepare those annual Christmas letters. This preparation is all good and well and certainly brings with it much joy, but the preparation the church is called to during this season is not about us, but like John, is about seeing, believing, and testifying to the world that the true Light has come into the world. Preparation that always point to the Word made flesh.

It is responding to the question, “Who are we?” Like John, we are called and sent by God. We are called in our Baptism, claimed as sons and daughters, and welcomed into the church on earth, then sent forth signed and sealed with the cross of Christ to bear witness to the promise God makes to us in our Baptism – forgiveness and eternal life. As we gather in worship, are fed with the word of God, the Spirit again sends us forth from with the words, “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”

Like John, we are the eyes, mouths and ears bringing the good news to the world. God commissions us to bear witness to the Messiah, the one who has come into the world and the one who will certainly come again. We are to always point to Christ, rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us.

We do this because God, who is faithful, has given us the most precious gift of all in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

We bear witness not only during Advent but most certainly our whole life. However, during this season the world looks to the church on earth with eager eyes. People are longing with great anticipation to find joy and comfort and it is we the church who need to witness to this joy. Some days it is not easy. This year more so than any other. However, we do continue to rejoice. We do give thanks for all the gifts God has entrusted us with. We do move forward trusting in God's faithfulness to God's people and opening our eyes to see Jesus standing in our midst and bringing God's love, protection, and comfort to God's children. We have seen Jesus Christ in ourselves, in our neighbor, and in those whom we do not know. As we are sent by the Holy Spirit to live out our baptismal calling, let us use the eyes God gave us to see, the ears God gave us to hear, and the mouths God gave us to speak, rejoice and bear witness to the world that the light has come into the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. (v.5)

One last word of note. Did you catch where all these activities took place. Verse 28 tell us, "in Bethany." A significant location in the life of Jesus. It is where his close friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived. It where he raised Lazarus from the dead. It is where preparations were made for his entry into Jerusalem prior to his death and resurrection. It is where he gathers with his disciples, 40 days following his resurrection, as he ascends to be with God, according to the gospel of Luke. We are told, "He blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." (Luke 24:50-52)

People of Bethany and all gathered, you are blessed by the risen Jesus just as those first 11 were as they gathered at Bethany. You are loved. We, too, worship with great joy. The third blue candle we lit earlier represents the joy we have through the advent (i.e., coming) of Christ. That joy was made complete through his death and resurrection and the assurance we too will be with him in heaven. May the light of joy always shine in your hearts!