

Advent 4 2019

There is a reason why half of the Advent season is dedicated to John the Baptist. He is the preparer which strikes at the very meaning of the ministry of John, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” he said, “make straight the way of the Lord.” This statement can only mean one thing and that is *Prepare your selves for the coming of the Lord*. During this most holy time of the year, we are to prepare ourselves in honor of the nativity of Christ, the one whose shoes neither of us are fit to untie. John preached repentance. He meant for us to search deep into our selves and face with courage those things we ought not to have done, list them and ask God for forgiveness.

Our Lord gave us these same words. “The time has come,” he said, “the kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Gospel.” Mark. 1:15. Believing the Gospel means to believe in Christ and in what he said, every day. Repentance involves a complete turning or changing of the mind and way of life to follow God and his way of life by living out his commandments. There is no other way.

Like our Lord, John is not new to the scriptures. He is characterized in New Testament but that is not the only place in scripture where he is mentioned. Mary who was three months pregnant, visited her Aunt Elizabeth. Elizabeth was pregnant as well with the child who would become John the Baptist. It was at that moment

the babe in Elizabeth's womb leaped for Joy. In other words, from the time he was in his mother's womb, he was aware of Christ and the leap in his mother's womb is the first indication we get of the purpose of John's birth. He would spend the rest of his life dedicated to preparing people for the savior Christ whom he knew from the womb.

As I said, John is mentioned in the Old Testament as well. Like our Lord, the prophets spoke of him and his ministry. Seven centuries before Christ's birth, Isaiah said in the 40th chapter of the book that carries his name: "Listen! It's the voice of someone shouting clear the way through the wilderness for the Lord! Make straight a highway through the wasteland for our God." 40:3. The wasteland is this fallen world with its lies and at times, evil ways. God, also speaking through the Prophet Malachi said "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way for me, and the Lord who you seek will suddenly be upon you." Malachi 3:1

The Gospel according to Saint Luke said of John: "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and lived in the deserts till the day of his showing to Israel.

Seventeen years after the boy Jesus taught the scriptures with the learned theologians in the temple, when Jesus was 29 years old, we find that many are discussing this man dressed in camel skin with the strange diet of eating grasshoppers, talking about Jesus or the one who was to come. His message caused many to ponder their sins.

He got through to them. They began to realize their need to repent, to prepare for the one who would take away their sins. He baptized them. Why? His baptizing them was symbolic, an acknowledgement of their heartfelt repentance for their wrongful behavior they learned from this fallen world. When asked what one means by a fallen world, the answer is sin. Behavior that delivers one to the prince of darkness who does not like to be called by name rather prefers to dwell in a fog of ambiguity. It's how he traps people. But with John there was no uncertainty; he called it as he saw it.

Moral corruption had made deep inroads into the Judaism of the time of Christ. It was in this world that John came preaching repentance.

Because of this corrupt Priests and Levites or Deacons came to see John. They attempted to do what they would try to do to Jesus. Trick him into saying something with which they could use against him. These were Pharisees, at the time evil men and false teachers. John Knew this. "Who are you?" they asked. "I am not the Messiah," he said. "Well then who are you? Are you Elijah?" "Nope." He answered. "Are you the prophet we are expecting?" "Naw," he said. "Why do you baptize then? What right do you have to do so?" "I baptize with water," he said. And in one sweeping sentence he exposed them for the frauds they were. Jesus was in the crowd at this time and heard every word. "There is someone here," John said, "who you do not even recognize." The religion of the day had become so disfigured by sin in high

places, those who expected the Messiah did not recognize him when he appeared. It is in the Gospel of Matthew that John calls these men “Sons of snakes.” Clergy! He was referring to the poison they spewed or false religion they preached to the people, killing their souls.

Today the church continues with the ministry of John. She is the preparer and the voice in the wilderness of sin. However, many false preachers exist today and in any time in history. They are not only men in religious garb, but politicians, secular people, organizations and voting blocks, who have an agenda at loggerheads with God’s truth. This is why the church is always under attack. Many swallow the poison of false teachers. But it cannot ever effect those who, like John know the one who is to come. When Jesus approached John to be baptized, John announced to the people that day: “Behold the Lamb of God,” he said, “behold him who takes away the sins of the world.” John 1:29. Therefore as we prepare during this Advent to greet Jesus this Christmas, let us approach him with pure hearts cleansed souls and hear those words ring out loud and clear, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him that takes away the sins of this world.”