

3 S. in Advent 12/13/20
John 1:6-8, 19-28 B

AND THIS IS THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN, WHEN THE JEWS SENT PRIESTS AND LEVITES FROM JERUSALEM TO ASK HIM, "WHO ARE YOU?"

John was in Bethany across the Jordan baptizing and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And, he was doing an awfully good job at it. All the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized him (cf. Mk 1:5). The Jewish authorities in Jerusalem were curious about all of this. They wanted to know who John was. So, they sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"

Which is a strange question, when you think about it, especially coming from the priests. After all, John's daddy, Zechariah, was a priest, one of them. There was a good chance that he had officiated in the Temple with these same priests.

There's an even better chance that they knew John's story. You remember the story of his parents Zechariah and Elizabeth? They were righteous before God, but they had no child and both were advanced in age. The day came when Zechariah was serving as a priest and an angel appeared to him and told him Elizabeth would bear a son and they were to name him John. Zechariah did not believe the words he heard from the angel, so he was unable to talk. And they knew what the angel Gabriel had said about this child, "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 just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Lk 1:17). So, there's a very good chance that when these priests go to John to ask him who he is, they know exactly who he is.

But they still ask him, “Who are you?” “Are you Elijah?” Elijah the great Old Testament prophet, who was taken up in heaven in the chariots of fire. The Prophet Malachi had prophesied, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes,” so the people expected Elijah to come again and here is John (Ma 4:5). And, he’s wearing the prophets clothing of camel’s hair and a leather belt. But, John says, “I am not.”

So, they ask him, “Are you the Prophet?” This was the new Moses that Moses himself told the people was coming,

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— just as you desired of the LORD your God at ... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him (De 18:15-18).

Moses, the Deliver, led his people to freedom from Egypt. So, the people were looking for the New Moses, the Prophet, to lead them to freedom from the hated Romans. John answers simply, “No,” he is not the Prophet.

So, he’s not the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet. And inquiring minds want to know, “‘Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said’” (vv. 22-23).

John could have said, “Hey! I am Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son. I am the one the angel Gabriel spoke about. I am John the Baptizer”. But John refused to talk about himself. John doesn’t want you to know who he is, he wants you to know who Jesus is.

“Who are you?” You are wanton to answer that question with an answer that goes something like this, “I am married to so-and-so. We have 2.5 above average children. I work at the Gas Plant. I worked at the mine, but I’m retired now. I am a Grandma. I am an Army veteran. I am a Miners fan. I like sports, or I don’t care for sports in the least. I wouldn’t even know what kind of ball to bring to a hockey game.”

Well, that’s all good information, but WHO ARE YOU? People want to know, so they ask you, “Who are you?” There are people struggling with sin, death, and the devil. People who dream and wish this to be the most wonderful time of the year, but they’re stressed out; at wit’s end; they don’t like the way the world is going. They are not finding things to be real pleasant in the world at the present time, with Covid, cancer, political upheaval, job and economic uncertainty, sexual immorality run amok, theft, vandalism, greed, lying, lust, coveting and jealousy.

And yet, Dear Child of God, you know who you are. The Apostle John writes of the Baptizer in our lesson, “He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light” (v. 8). The Light of the world, Jesus Christ, came to us in the flesh at His birth in Bethlehem’s stable. Very God of very God who humbled Himself to be born of a virgin to battle and overcome sin, death, and the devil. He battled the devil in the wilderness, as He remained faithful in the face of the father of all lies’ lies. He battled the flesh, as He forgave the woman caught in adultery. He battled the world, as He ate with “sinners,” and hung out not with the rich and powerful, but with tax collectors and prostitutes.

The Light of the world went into battle of the cross, bearing the darkness of all the world’s sin. Because of that darkness, the Light of the

World was wounded and crushed. He bled and died all over that cross. But the 3rd day, He rose again to bring you forgiveness and everlasting life.

John reflected and shone the Light of the word, Jesus, and, you can do the same. That is because in that blessed washing of your Baptism, God makes you new in Christ. You live in Christ, and Christ live sin you, so that you can do the same as John -- reflect and shine the Light of Christ with your thoughts, words, and deeds.

When the conversation turns to one who has died or when you are visiting with someone who has just lost a loved one, share with them the joy of eternal life in heaven that we have in Christ.

When you are visiting with someone struggling with all this Covid and the uncertainty, almost hopelessness, that it has brought up on us; or maybe its cancer, or arthritis, or another affliction, share with them how God gives us strength to bear our crosses and how He gives us the hope of heaven, where He will wipe all tears from our lives and all earthly sorrows will be gone.

The pink candle is burning on our Advent wreath. Pink symbolizes joy. Paul writes in our Epistle, "Rejoice always" (1 Th 5:16). My Dear Friends in Christ, whatever our outward circumstances, we can be joyful. We can be joyful because Christ has come to save us from all the threatening perils of our sins, including death itself. As we journey by faith through this wilderness darkened by sin, the Light of the World, lights our Way to heaven, and we have the joy and the privilege of doing the same as John – reflecting and shining Jesus so that those that God in His wisdom brings into our lives may know how sweet it is to have heaven, where we will be with Jesus, forever and ever, without end. Amen.