

JOHN THE BAPTIST: VOICE OF PREPARATION

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 1:1:57-67, 76-80.

PP#1: Luke 1:57-67, 76-80

57 When the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, she gave birth to a boy. 58 Her neighbors and relatives celebrated with her because they had heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy. 59 On the eighth day, it came time to circumcise the child. They wanted to name him Zechariah because that was his father's name. 60 But his mother replied, "No, his name will be John."

61 They said to her, "None of your relatives have that name." 62 Then they began gesturing to his father to see what he wanted to call him.

Reader: **Luke 1:57-67, and 76-80**

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PP#2: Luke 1:57-67, 76-80

63 After asking for a tablet, he surprised everyone by writing, "His name is John." 64 At that moment, Zechariah was able to speak again, and he began praising God.

65 All their neighbors were filled with awe, and everyone throughout the Judean highlands talked about what had happened. 66 All who heard about this considered it carefully. They said, "What then will this child be?" Indeed, the Lord's power was with him.

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67 John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, ...

76 You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, For you will go before the Lord to prepare his way. 77 You will tell his people how to be saved through the forgiveness of their sins. 78 Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, 79 to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace."

80 The child grew up, becoming strong in character. He was in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel.

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 the Lord to prepare his way. You will tell his people how to be saved through the
 forgiveness of their sins. Because of our God’s deep compassion, the dawn from heaven
 will break upon us, to give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow
 of death, to guide us on the path of peace.’
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 until he began his public ministry to Israel.”

PP#4: The Voices of Christmas

John the Baptist: The Voice of Preparation

““A voice crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight.’” - Luke 3:4b

JOHN THE BAPTIST SPEAKS:

[*Holding a staff.*]

Are you ready?

Well, get ready! Prepare the way! The Lord's day is at hand. When He comes, He will thresh the wheat. He will separate the grain from the chaff. The grain He will gather to Himself, but the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire.

PP#5: *Image of John preaching sternly in the wilderness*

What? What do you mean, “negative preaching?” I think that's very positive. Positively, prepare yourself. Positively, the Lord is coming. Positively, you'd better be ready. Positively, He will not abide iniquity. What's negative about that?

What? Not very Christmas-y? I'm sorry. I don't even remember the first Christmas. Oh, I was there, but I was only three months old at the time. My parents told me about it, though. In fact, my father was the first to have news of it. He was Zachariah, a priest in the division of Abijah [ă-BĪ-jă]. The angel Gabriel met him at the altar of incense in the temple and told him that I would be born as the Messiah's forerunner.

My father used to teach me from the Prophet Malachi. "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord, and he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)

"That is you, John," he would say. "God has given you the ministry of Elijah to prepare the way of the Messiah." I think he hoped I would follow him in the priesthood. Ha! As if I could be a priest! Those compromised, corrupted nest of snakes! “The ax is laid to the root, and every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire!” They call themselves priests? Not my father, of course. He was a godly man. And there were others like him. But the temple is no place for an Elijah.

PP#6: *Image of Elijah confronting Ahab, prophesying no rain for 7 years.*

Elijah had it right. Ahab—the king of Israel, heir to the promises of God—he erected altars to Ba-al, a temple to Ba-al!, and he went up to worship. He put a nation to sleep, but Elijah woke them

up. He stood against the king. "As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

And he went to the wilderness beyond the Jordan and he ate whatever the ravens brought him. So I wear these rough clothes. I eat wilderness food. Those who wear silk and linen are found in the temple and in king's palaces, but when the wrong king is in the palace it is time to announce judgment and then head for the wilderness! That is Elijah's way. It is the Lord's day, and judgment will begin with the household of God. So prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God, for He comes to judge the earth and with righteousness to judge the world and the peoples with His truth!

PP#7: *Image of John the Baptist, disheveled, long hair, dressed in skins, in the desert preaching*

Jesus was a cousin. Before my parents died, they told me about Mary and Joseph and the promise of her son, how she came to visit my mother Elizabeth while she was still pregnant with me. I always knew Jesus was God's Messiah. But we didn't meet. After my parents died, I was taken in by a friend of my father, another priest. I stayed long enough to learn the scrolls, but I was not born to be a priest in the temple. I would find my own way.

I always wondered when it would happen—when Messiah would be revealed and usher in God's kingdom, bring forgiveness, and establish righteousness. I waited. I was 20. Then 25. During those years, I taught disciples who wanted to get back to what was really real. I explained the prophets, the promises of God, how a Savior was coming. I also grew more and more disgusted with all the endless rituals of the religious people. All they cared about was the pomp and circumstance! Disgusting! What empty religion! I taught people to follow the one true and living God!

I turned 30. And finally the Spirit of God wouldn't let me wait any longer. I started preaching in the wilderness along the Jordan. "Get ready! God's Messiah is coming! You must repent! Turn away from your wickedness, your selfish endeavors, your empty, endless strivings! God is at hand! Wake up! Repent! Change your life! Get ready!"

PP#8: *Image of John baptizing some people - NOT Jesus! Or, a first century immersion baptism.*

I became the Baptizer. Baptism was a sign of repentance, a turn toward a new way of life. Baptism washed away the old, the sin, and made for a new start. I first saw it up in the communes. There it was for a select few. But I knew that God's invitation was to all people. So I invited anyone who desired to come for baptism. Mine was a baptism of true repentance. Not just some elite ceremonial rite, but for everyone who would turn from their sins and declare they were ready to receive the promised King of God. So, as I preached, I told people that they would have to do something to take their stand, to show that they were committed. "Come, and get wet!"

They were ready to hear. Great crowds came. God was calling them out. Many men came to me and I taught them. I taught them to pray. I taught them to preach. I taught them to baptize.

Some of my disciples were from other countries, who had come to Jerusalem for just a trip or holiday, or ceremony. When they went back they took the message with them. "Repent, for God's kingdom is very close! God's King will soon appear! You must be ready!"

All the time, I knew He would come. I watched the crowd. I looked for Him. I expected Him.

PP#9: *Image of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, with the dove coming down.*

And one day, He came! I pointed to Him and shouted, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!”

He asked me to baptize Him! He didn’t need it, but He insisted. He wanted to demonstrate that God’s people were to be baptized.

So I did. And when I did, I saw the sign of God’s Spirit come down and rest upon Him.

Some of my disciples left me to follow Him. Fine by me. I had many more to make.

I knew the day had come at last. So I grew bolder and more urgent in my preaching. Herod had me arrested for some of that urgent preaching. I still sit in his prison. He thinks I’m a curiosity. He has no idea what it’s all about, but he doesn’t know what to do with me.

How is it on the outside? What’s happening? What’s Jesus doing? Herod is still on the throne, so Jesus has not made His move yet. I don’t really get that. Here is the new King, but Herod still sits on the throne. And the Emperor in Rome is still in charge. What’s this new Kingdom going to look like? How is it going to begin?

PP#10: *Close up image of John the Baptist preaching urgently, (or, perhaps, from prison!)*

All I know is that the King has come to His people. There still is time for you to seize the kingdom, to press your way in before the end. Now is the hour of salvation! Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts! Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!

I am the voice of preparation. Not for a cute, little baby on a quiet, starry night. Christmas is too big for that. So get ready. Not for a cute little baby, but for a King coming to reclaim His kingdom who will wait no longer for the rebellious to turn back. Stop all of your ridiculous hustling and bustling, all of your empty parties and merrymaking. That is not Christmas! Season of happiness? Bah! Christmas is about a new King born! That new King is our Lord and Savior. You must get ready to receive Him! You must take Him as your King! You must follow His ways. Christmas is about getting ready! Prepare! The Lord’s day is coming, a great and terrible and day, wonderful and marvelous.

[Walking off the stage...]

Prepare the way!

Prepare!

Prepare!

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR DEC. 6, 2015

Christmas Series: “The Voices of Christmas”

Sermon #3: “John the Baptist: The Voice of Preparation”

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself & share a time when God had to correct you or change you.

Context: Skim Luke 1:1-56. Review: What is going on in this chapter?

Read: Luke 1:57-67

1. Verse 58. How had the Lord shown Elizabeth great mercy? Share a time when God has shown you great mercy.

2. Verse 59. The ceremony of circumcision committed the baby to God, proclaimed God’s promises for that child, and gave the child its name. How is this like infant baptism?

3. Verse 60-63. Where did Elizabeth and Zechariah get the idea of naming their son John?

4. Verse 65. What did Zechariah do when he could speak again?

5. Verse 66. From the story so far, how would you answer their question, “What then will this child be?”

6. Verse 66. What do you think it means when it says, “Indeed the Lord’s power was with him”?

Read: Luke 1:76-80

7. Verses 76-77. Identify the three prophecies Zechariah made about his son John.

8. Verses 78-79. Zechariah proclaims good news. Explain what it means. For example, what is the dawn from heaven? How does it break upon us? How does it give light to those in darkness? Etc.

9. Verse 80. Why, do you think, John stayed in the wilderness?

10. What do you think John’s message means for us today?

11. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?