

Dec. 23: 4th Sunday in Advent, String Quartet

Dec. 24: Christmas Eve, Sanctify

Message: John the Baptist: Declare! #4: Look!

Scripture: Luke 1:39-45

John 1:29, 36

Incorporate Hymn #208 "Canticle of Zechariah" (Luke 1:68-79)

Memory Verse: "John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" -John 1:29

Blurb: Christmas lights, decorations, and merrymaking are everywhere! There is so much to dazzle the eyes. But where do your eyes rest this Christmas? What do you look at that penetrates into your heart? What do you see that is more than a passing flash? Perhaps John the Baptist has the answer. He says, "Look!" and points to Jesus. Look hard. Can you see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Of all there is to see this Christmas, rest your eyes on the baby Jesus!

Opening Song: 23: *Instrumental* -Cavantina
24: *Joy to the World* -Sanctify

Welcome: -Pastor David

Memory Verse:
"John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" -John 1:29

Worship Music Set:
23: Cavantina
O Holy Night
Christmas Medley
24: Sanctify
Angels from the Realm of Glory/Emmanuel
O Little Town of Bethlehem
What Child Is This?

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Advent Wreath

Serve Moment: Christmas Offering

Video: What I like about school lunches

Offering: 23: Instrumental - Cavantina
24: Instrumental - Sanctify

Children's Time: -Pastor Andrew

Canticle of Zechariah *UMH* #208

Prayers: -Pastor David

Bumper Video

Message: John the Baptist: Declare! #4: Look!

PP#1: John the Baptist: Declare! #4: Look!

“When John saw Jesus walking along, John said, ‘Look! The Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.” -John 1:36-37

As we get ready for Christmas, we’ve been listening to John the Baptist. God sent John to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. John’s job was to declare. And the main message he declared was one simple word, “Look!” John 1:36-37, “When [John the Baptist] saw Jesus walking along, John [pointed to Jesus and declared], ‘Look! The Lamb of God!’ The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.” -John 1:36-37

PP#2: *Extravagant Christmas scene, like in a mansion, or Rockefeller Square, or such.*

Christmas is a pretty big deal, I’d say. It’s the #1 holiday celebrated around the world, even beating New Year’s by most accounts. Here in America, more money is spent on Christmas than all the other holidays of the year *combined*...\$800 per person! Christmas is king, and everybody knows about it. Christmas is not so much a silent night!

And rightfully so, I’d say. Christmas celebrates one of the most important events in all of human history! The almighty God comes on earth to save people from sin and death. He is born—the one and only time—as a human baby, became like one of us, so that He could lead us back to God. Without Christmas, we would have no hope, no joy, no peace, no life. It is a big deal!

PP#3: *A distance scene of Jesus’ birth, looking alone, dark, and forgotten*

But how different Christmas is celebrated now compared to that very first Christmas, when Jesus was actually born. The first Christmas was all but missed, and the only reason it wasn’t was because God intervened and pointed it out to a select few.

It was the biggest event in human history since creation and the fall. The global flood under Noah can’t come close! God, coming to save people for an eternity of life abundant: we rank Jesus’ birth second only to His death and resurrection...but since they are dependently linked, they are really one event, although we celebrate them four months apart.

Yet, for all intents and purposes, the world completely missed it when it actually happened. Two peasant travelers alone in a strange place, in the middle of the night, off in a forgotten corner of the world...a “flyover” village, for sure...one dark exit on the interstate.

God intended for that first Christmas to be a small deal, on purpose. On purpose, because it really wasn’t about worldly affairs. It wasn’t about governments, or economies, or anything the Kardashians were doing. It didn’t hit the news because it wasn’t about affecting the powers that be.

It was small, because it was bigger than everything. It was beyond what the world cared about. It didn’t register on the “important” meter of a self-absorbed society.

All of heaven was freaking out, though, mind you! The heavenly armies were marching on parade, and the forces of evil were in full retreat. But on earth, a silent night.

So, God had to point out what was going on, so not everyone would miss it. Over and over again, God declared, “Look!” Millennia before He told the patriarchs to record the some-day coming of a future Savior. Then, seven centuries before it happened, God increased the chatter on the prophets line. Get ready! Keep alert! It’s going to happen. Look! Look for a baby boy born to a virgin in the town of Bethlehem.

But Bethlehem’s “Future Home of the Messiah” sign had fallen over generations before.

So, God goes to a priest at the temple. The angel tells Zechariah that he and his wife will bear a miracle son, who will be called John. John’s role will be to declare the coming of the Lord, and point to the Messiah (Luke 1:17). So, before Mary’s miraculous conception of Jesus, her cousin miraculously conceived a son.

PP#4: Luke 1:34-37 (CEB)

34 Then Mary said to the angel, “How will this happen since I haven’t had sexual relations with a man?”

35 The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God’s Son. 36 **LOOK!**, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled ‘unable to conceive’ is now six months pregnant. 37 Nothing is impossible for God.”

And when God’s angel appears to Mary, telling her the unbelievable news that it was finally happening, the angel says to Mary, Look! Go look at your cousin Elizabeth. She, who could never bear children, and who is now far too old to bear children, is pregnant. Look!

PP#5: Luke 1:39-45 (CEB)

39 Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. 40 She entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, **the child leaped in her womb**, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 With a loud voice she blurted out, “God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. 43 Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her.”

So, when Mary becomes pregnant, she goes to Elizabeth, to go look. And the moment pregnant Mary shows up, Elizabeth’s baby, still unborn—but in her last trimester—jumps crazily in Elizabeth’s womb. Even before either of them are born, John declares that Jesus is the Savior. John, even then, points to Jesus.

PP#6: Luke 1:68-79 (CEB)

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.”

John is born, and at last Zechariah can speak again. The first thing he says is a prophesy. Standing in the long and noble line of God's prophets, Zechariah declares the Savior is coming. Then, he takes his own baby boy and declares, "You, my John, will declare the coming of the Lord. You will point to the Savior and say, "Look! There He is! Don't miss Him!" You will call all people to follow Him. Into our confusing obscurity of darkness, God's Light is coming. He will be our Light, and save us from death, and lead us into peace.

PP#7: Matthew 2:1-2 (CEB)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. They asked, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We've seen his star in the east, and we've come to honor him."

Six months pass. Christmas night. Bethlehem is bustling with travelers from all over, The inn is full. Joseph and a very pregnant Mary finally arrive. The kind innkeeper lets them rest in the warm stable. And the time comes for God Almighty to be born as a human, to save the entire human race from sin and death. And on the world stage, the only people who know about it are Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah, and whoever has believed them. And my guess is that it isn't many, because no one else came along to help them on their journey! Think about it, if you really believed that the Messiah was about to be born, regardless of the census, wouldn't you have gone along?

But, Jesus is born, in an obscure stable, and the only people there are Mary and Joseph.

So, to announce the dazzling miracle, a star flashes in the sky. This is God's neon sign flashing, "Hey, everyone! Look! Don't miss this!" But, to our knowledge, it is only noticed by a handful of astrologers hundreds of miles away. They grasp the importance of what is going on, and they decide to go worship the child as the new king. But, remember, they are from far away, and it takes them weeks...months?...to finally get there.

PP#8: Luke 2:8-18 (CEB)

8 Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. 9 The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 The angel said, "Don't be afraid! **Look!** I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. 11 Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord. 12 This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger."

13 Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angel praising God. They said, 14 "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

So, lest the miracle be completely missed, God sends angels to shepherds in the field right next to the village. The angel said, "**Look!** It's happened! Salvation for all people on earth! Your Savior is born as a baby over there in Bethlehem. He's the Messiah, the Lord God! Look!"

And at that point, the heavenly hosts can no longer be cloaked from the material world, and the sky explodes with angels, all praising God and declaring, "He brings peace to you on earth!"

PP#9: Luke 2:8-18 (CEB)

15 When the angels returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go right now to Bethlehem and **see** what's happened. Let's **confirm [look for ourselves]** what the Lord has revealed to us." 16 They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they **reported** what they had been told about this child. 18 Everyone who heard it was amazed at what the shepherds told them.

The shepherds were told, “Don’t miss it! Go look!” So, they go look! They go to Bethlehem to see for themselves. So now, in the stable, we add a handful of shepherds to the greatest event in history. Then, it says, they go and report, tell others, “Look! Over there in the stable, the Messiah is born!”

Now, I hope that a few went over to go look. But my guess is that most people just talked about it. It was late, and it was just shepherds, after all. Maybe at the coffee shop two men agreed that perhaps the next day they had better re-post the village’s “Future Home of the Messiah” sign.

The night, the most holy of nights, passes in quiet obscurity. That first Christmas was almost missed! If God hadn’t pointed it out to a handful of folks, it would have been totally unnoticed.

PP#10: *Image of John the Baptist in the desert.*

Jesus grows up unnoticed, as well. Back in Nazareth, we assume He never met his cousin John. Now, John’s a peculiar fellow. He lives out in the desert, wearing camel skins for clothing, and he eats food from the wilderness: honey and locust. But he continues his calling, his role.

He declares that God’s Kingdom is coming. Salvation is at hand. And so, he rants against the apathy of the people, and tells them the Messiah will soon show Himself. He calls them to repent and he baptizes people who agree to change their ways. And then, one day, Jesus shows up.

PP#11: John 1:27-37 (CEB)

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “**Look!** The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the One about whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is really greater than me because He existed before me.’ 31 Even I didn’t recognize Him, but I came baptizing with water **so that He might be made known** to Israel.”

Turn to John, chapter 1. Here we have a Christmas repeat. This time, they are not babies in their mothers’ wombs, but are both fully-grown men. But the encounter is much the same. We pick it up at verse 29, “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “**Look!** [Look there! See Him? He is] The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the One about whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is really greater than me because He existed before me.’ Even I didn’t recognize Him, but I came baptizing with water **so that He might be made known** to Israel.”

I think John is saying here, when he says that he didn’t “recognize him,” that he didn’t go hang out with Jesus before now, because his role was to be out baptizing and getting people ready, so he could point other people to Jesus.

PP#12: John 1:27-37 (CEB)

32 John testified, “**I saw the Spirit coming down** from heaven like a dove, and it rested on Him. 33 Even I didn’t recognize Him, but the One who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The One on whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 **I have seen and testified that this One is God’s Son.**”

John’s message now changes. It was “Get ready! He’s coming!”

Now, it’s, “Look! There He is!” Verse 32, “John testified, ‘**I [looked and I] saw the Spirit coming down** from heaven like a dove, and it rested *on Him*. Even I didn’t recognize Him [I didn’t follow Him before], but the One who sent me to baptize with water [God] said to me, ‘The One on

whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' **I have seen [I've looked!] and testified that this One is God's Son.**" I baptize with water for repentance. This Messiah baptizes with God's own Spirit. He is God's Son! Look!

Imagine you're there. You've heard that John is a prophet, and the prophets have foretold of the coming of the Savior. This John, although a bit weird, also claims that the Savior is soon here. You and a friend go out and you listen to John, wondering if he is true. God convicts your heart, and you and your friend decide to be baptized. Then, one day, you hear that the day before John had identified a man from Galilee as the Savior. You hang close to John.

PP#13: John 1:27-37 (CEB)

35 The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus walking along he said, **"Look! The Lamb of God!"** 37 The two disciples **heard** what he said, **and they followed Jesus.**

Verse 35, "The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus walking along he said, **"Look! The Lamb of God!"** 37 **The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.**

PP#14: Look!

Christmas wasn't a big deal when Jesus was born. So God sent out the message, "Look! Don't miss it!" Patriarchs, prophets, angels, shepherds. John the Baptist. All declaring, "Look!" Cut through all the noise, all the activity, all the commotion that we people fill our lives with. "There! There He is! See Him? Look!"

John the Baptist, with this message, is a key part of the Christmas story. But his role continues, whenever Jesus comes. When Jesus shows up on the public scene, 30 years later, there is still a lot of commotion. People are trying to find God. They're struggling to see where He is. What do we do? How do we get help? We are stuck and need a savior. Our lives are dark, without God's light. They are cold, without the warmth of inner joy and true peace. We are lifeless, no matter how busy we look, without abundant and eternal life. And John declares, "Look! He has come: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The two disciples heard what John said, looked over and saw Jesus, and then followed Jesus.

This is Christmas!

PP#15: Look!

1. Make Jesus your Lord and Savior!

Today, things really aren't that much different than that first Christmas, when the whole world mostly missed Jesus. Yes, we celebrate Christmas in a big way, the world over. But even with all this extravagant celebration, most people still miss the Jesus of Christmas. Christmas is often about the celebration, rather than the Savior we celebrate. And we are in danger of missing the blessing God came to give us. When we celebrate with decorations and food and presents and parties and movies and shows, we can become so busy, so full, so caught up in the stress of it all, that we don't look to see Jesus.

John the Baptist continues to declare: Look! There He is! He has come. Our Savior! In Him is inner joy. With Him is peace that carries us over troubled waters. Through Him comes life abundant and life forever. Look! Don't miss Him!

Christmas is about celebrating, but it is only worth celebrating when we look *and see*, when we go and kneel, when we choose to make Him our Lord and Savior. We celebrate Christmas big when we, like those two disciples, choose to listen to John and choose to follow Jesus.

This Christmas, hear John's voice. Look! Don't miss Him. He has come! Choose to make Him your Lord and Savior!

PP#16: Look!

1. Make Jesus your Lord and Savior!
2. Be John's voice of declaration to others!

And when we do, our voice joins John's voice. We, too, declare, to those around us, those near us, those whom God has placed within our hearing, "Look! See Jesus! Don't miss Him!" Help! those around you this Christmas find Jesus?

Look! Look hard. Can you see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Of all there is to see this Christmas, rest your eyes on the baby Jesus!

Amen.

Closing Song: *Is He Worthy* - Canatina

Memory Verse:

"John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" -John 1:29

Announcements: -Pastor David

Christmas Offering
Homeless Shelter
Christmas Camp

Benediction: -Pastor David