

**Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent    December 13, 2020**  
**The Brightest Light is the Hardest to See**

Today we continue to take a look at the work of John the Baptizer. John is a fixture in the church at this time of year as he was the one sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. In Hebrew, John's name means "Yahweh [God] is gracious." In what way did God show his grace in the life of John?

God sent John to help people see Jesus as their savior from sin, death, and hell. The Father wants people to know Jesus as the light of the world. Problem is, we are not able to see Jesus' light. We are born blind to it. In this world we are guided by sight, hearing, feelings, and reason. None of these faculties can sense Jesus' light. We need someone to take us by the hand and lead us to Christ. God in his grace sent John for that purpose. He was that "voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" John cried out concerning the impending coming of the Lord. Through John's work, people's eyes were opened, albeit only slightly, to be better prepared to see the light of Jesus when the time came. What was John's goal? He was preparing people for a life of faith in Christ. This faith John came to prepare people for isn't something that we naturally possess. Martin Luther teaches this in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles Creed:

***I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.*** Luther's Small Catechism - Apostles Creed Third Article

There is a brochure in the rack in our narthex entitled *Reasons to Believe*. The pamphlet talks about how many events recorded in the Bible are also found in secular, non-Biblical writings. Archeological findings also agree with some of the what, where, and when of the Bible. However, when push comes to shove, there are ABSOLUTELY NO human reasons whatsoever that would lead us to conclude that Jesus Christ is the eternal, divine Son of God and that his work delivers us from condemnation and saves us to be the eternal blessed people of God. There are facts that agree with the Bible's story. There is much evidence from nature that points to some kind of intelligent designer behind everything. But there is nothing there to prove Jesus as Savior and Lord. That is why we are taught to *believe*.

We live by faith, not by sight [reason and senses]. And what is more, that faith is ours only when God the Holy Spirit creates in us a believing heart. We talk about people coming to faith in Jesus Christ. That does not mean they have arrived at the point where they have found all the answers to all their questions. It does not even mean they have received satisfactory answers to their questions that they can live with. Sometimes just the opposite is true! Often when people come to faith they have more questions than before. Faith means taking something as true that cannot be proven.

We live by faith all the time. We make an appointment in advance. The morning of the appointment we get up like any other morning. The appointment is at 10. It's a 20-minute drive. About 9:30 we go out to the car and assume it will start and get us to our appointment by 10. We have faith in our car. It has been reliable almost every time before except that time when we let the battery die when we were away for a stretch of time. We can't PROVE our car will start and work properly. We just have faith it will. We also have faith the roads are in useable condition, bridges won't collapse, the traffics lights work, and all the other drivers will behave themselves. We can't prove any of these either. We just believe.

But there is greater faith in other areas of our lives. The doctor writes us a prescription for a new pill. We pick it up at the drugstore. We put one in our mouth, take a drink of water and swallow. We have faith the doctor picked the drug that is the right one for us and will help us.

When we were new to Pittsburgh some friends told us one of the best places to get a Rueben sandwich was Big Jim's in Greenfield. We took it on faith and went to the restaurant. What a dive! But the Ruebens – among the best we have ever had. For years people told us another great place for a Rueben is Emil's in Rankin. We went on faith. The sandwiches are delicious there, too. We had no way to prove what people said about these establishments. We went on faith because we trusted the word of friends.

John the baptizer wanted to steer people in the right direction, too. Not for a good sandwich, but that they would receive the true Messiah – Jesus Christ. The people knew about a messiah to come. But they had forgotten what to look for. Often they were looking in the wrong places. Thankfully, many trusted the word of John, were baptized by him, and were that much more ready for Jesus.

Without this pre-messiah work of John, most would have not been able to receive Jesus. The light of Christ is just too bright for the unprepared to see. As is often the case, the brightest light is the hardest light to look at. Jesus is the brightest light of all. As the Bible says, Jesus is the light of the world. As far as John is concerned, the Bible says:

***He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. John 1:8***

John's ministry was so successful that he became a celebrity as we say today.

He rose to rock star status.

Because John was so popular, there was a great risk that he would become the main event, rather than Jesus. Even the religious leaders were wondering who exactly John was. They sent some men from their group to ask John if he was indeed the messiah:

***And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." John 1:19-20***

Since John was not the promised deliverer, he continually directed the people's eyes toward the messiah who was to come. Oftentimes we read John saying something like this:

***John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." John 1:26-27***

The people did not know about Jesus and would have a very difficult time finding and knowing him. While John preached his message of repentance and baptism, he also continually turned his hearer's attention toward the one who was to come – Jesus Christ. After all, it was not all about John. It was all about Jesus. John had no ability to deliver anyone from God's judgement. Jesus can. Because of this great disparity, John took a very humble attitude when comparing himself to Jesus. In comparison to Jesus, John did not even consider himself worth rating. He did not even think of himself as the lowest of servants in terms of Jesus.

Because of his humility and how he always redirected the focus off himself and onto Jesus, God accomplished great things through John. Jesus said John was the

greatest of all the prophets. We thank God for that and how we are able to remember God's graciousness shown in John to this very day.

As we are now far along in our preparations for Christmas Day, how good for us to remember how hard it is to see Jesus as the light of the world. We thank God for all those he has sent to us in his grace who, like John, helped prepare us to see his light – parents, grandparents, pastors, teachers, and the rest. We thank God that he has revealed his word of truth to us in the Bible, always pointing us to God's riches in Christ.

God bless you as together we behold the mercy, kindness, faithfulness, holiness and goodness of Jesus who is the light in our lives and the light of the world.  
Amen.

Ron Breight, Pastor  
Christ Lutheran Church  
400 Barclay Avenue  
Forest Hills, PA

Sunday bulletins and sermons available online at [christlutheranfh.org](http://christlutheranfh.org)  
Service video recordings on YouTube – Christ Lutheran Forest Hills PA