

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

His miraculous conception, his birth and his name were given by divine revelation. The Archangel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias as he served in the Temple, and revealed that she who had been barren would give birth to a son. But before that son was born he began his prophetic work.

At the sound of the voice of the Mother of God, in the protection and comfort of the mysterious darkness of Elizabeth's womb, the Forerunner saw the Light. His prophetic leap pointed not to himself, but to the Christ. Before his infant eyes saw the light of day, John saw the True Light that had come into the world.

As his Divine Cousin approached the Jordan waters, the one who bore the name given by the angel cried out that his hearers know and understand – John was not the Light. Not Elizabeth's son, but Mary's Son, was sinlessly conceived by the Holy Ghost. And while both cousins would be put to death, only one of those deaths would avail for the forgiveness of sins. For one of the cousins had a human father. It is Mary's Son, not Elizabeth's, that is the True Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Those very words John spoke to point away from himself. He desired that his disciples turn from him and believe in the Christ. John, however popular with the people, however confusing to the Pharisees, was not the Christ. He was, as the Prophet foretold, the "voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the Way of the Lord.'"

John preached a baptism he could not give. He preached repentance, but he could not forgive sins. John baptized with water. But he promised One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John came to give men knowledge of One who would forgive sins. He pointed to the One who would die for the sins of the world, the Lord whose Way John prepared.

By Divine Call and Revelation, John knew that the One upon whom the Holy Spirit descended and remained is the Son of God, the One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. So John knew. He knew that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world. The Light that could not be obscured by the darkness of Elizabeth's womb was certainly not obscured by prison bars. John's entire life and ministry had been to point others to Christ. So John sent two of his disciples to Christ. From prison John did what God had sent him to do.

But the question "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" was not a question that John had. John knew. He did not ask for himself. Even in the shadow of death, John knew that Jesus is the Christ. He gave his disciples the question so that they would ask, and receive the answer themselves. And in our Lord's answer, you too learn the Truth.

That Truth brings Light into darkness. For the world was very dark. And it is just as dark, indeed even darker, today. So it is that the Prophet declares "...surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades..." Men are mortal. And they are fallible. Men need a Savior, whether they want to admit it or not. In self-absorbed pride, men are stiff-necked and hard-hearted. But no inflexible knee, no stony heart, and no stiff neck can withstand the coming fire.

The Apostle writes: “I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this.” How many of us can say that? “I know nothing against myself?” For as fallen and as stubborn as sinful men are, they are still aware that they sin. They may try to justify their sins. They may try to minimize their sins. They may hold the good things that they do outweigh the bad.

But all men must confess that they sin. And if you have come to believe that you don't sin, consider the Ten Commandments. Just ask those around you. The Apostle himself, who knew of nothing against himself, still confessed that he was “chief of sinners.” And if you're honest, you'll confess the same.

It is one thing to admit that you sin. It is another to feel sorry for your sins. It is another thing entirely to believe that for your sins you have merited eternal punishment from God. But that is exactly the case, admit it or not. For soon the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.

If you're honest, you'll confess that you can't save yourself. If you're honest, you'll confess that you need a Savior. And if you believe the Scriptures, it can't be John the Baptizer or his baptism. So hearken to the Forerunner. Hear his preaching. He points you to Christ. You need what Christ alone can give. You have lived in darkness. You need the Light of Life. You have sinned. You need the forgiveness of your sins. You need what the Lamb of God alone can give.

So do as John directed his disciples to do: Go to Jesus. Go to the One who can truly forgive sins. Go to the One who gives a baptism for the remission of sins that fills you with the Holy Spirit. Consider the signs, the visible, external works of the Coming One: “. . .the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.”

In Christ you see. In Christ you are led by the Spirit of God. In Christ you are healed. In Christ you hear God's Word. In Christ you are forgiven. You have the Gospel preached to you. And blessed are you who are not offended because of Him. For you too will be raised up.

The grass withers. The flower fades. But the word of our God stands forever. And that Word finds its center in the Incarnate Word, who died for your sins, and rose for your justification. Mary's Son, God's Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost, soon comes again in glory. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, then each one's praise will come from God.

So rejoice, dear Christian, and receive the comfort the Prophet promised in the Coming Christ. For in Him your iniquity is pardoned. Rejoice, and receive from the lips and the hands of His Called and Ordained Steward the Mysteries that Christ bestows upon His Church. Hear and believe. Receive the absolution that Christ won for you. Eat and drink, and receive the Body and Blood of your Lord. And rejoice!

For these are the Mysteries that bring the comfort the Prophet promised, the Mysteries by which Christ comes to you, His glory now veiled in Word and Bread and Wine. But soon the Glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

St. Matthew 11:2-10
Gaudete, the Third Sunday in Advent, 2019 A. ✠ D.

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