

RORATE COELI / THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Text: St. John 1:19-28

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✱ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

“If you are willing to receive it,” Saint John the Baptist is the messenger foretold by the Old Testament prophets. According to the prophets, John was to be sent by God to prepare the way of the LORD. He was destined to cry out in the wilderness of sin that is this world, warning all people to repent of their sins and to believe in the One who would follow him. Like the prophet Malachi of old, St. John spoke of the coming One who was to burn up the stubble and chaff with unquenchable fire.

Thus, St. John came speaking in the desert wilderness of Judea. He came to *“Prepare the way of the LORD,”* to *“Make His paths straight.”* John was the voice in the wilderness making way for the Word Incarnate, preaching a Baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. With his voice, John prepared God’s people to meet the very Word of God made flesh who will baptize them with the HOLY SPIRIT and with fire. St. John came speaking a simple message: *“Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”*

That was it. Simple. Straight forward. No embellishment. No fluff. Cut directly to the chase. *“Repent, for your God has come to save you.”* A new era of salvation was about to dawn; a time of preparation had now arrived. John preached that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and the Creator of all things was about to brake in on His creation. The Sun of Righteousness was arising, and with Him, He would bring healing in His wings.

So it is then, that John came with his message of repentance and Baptism to prepare the way for his LORD and ours—JESUS. In preparing the way for JESUS, the coming MESSIAH, John the Baptist would make His way straight by filling in the valleys, bringing low the mountains, making straight the crooked, and smoothing the rough places.

You see, dear ones, it was necessary that the way of the MESSIAH be made straight. Indeed, the road made crooked by the brokenness of mankind and the world had to be made straight through preaching that called for the repentance of sin with a contrite heart and a confident faith in God and His promises, and by Baptism with the HOLY SPIRIT and fire, in order to make of God’s ancient people, and of you, the children of God. John heralded the way of CHRIST by teaching the way of repentance and offering a washing that brings the forgiveness of sins provided by JESUS’ bloody, atoning death on the Cross of Calvary.

For this reason, St. John shared the message of the coming of the LORD with single-minded resolve. He knew that there is nothing more important than the message that God’s only SON, has come to save His people. He shared the message with all those who would hear—even His enemies. He shared the message without sugarcoating it. Even while he called His enemies

venomous snakes, he warned and told them to produce fruits worthy of repentance; and the worthiest fruit of repentance my friends was then, and is, even unto this day, to be made prepared for your MESSIAH when He comes—to submit to God’s Word through preaching and Baptism for the forgiveness of your sins.

Thus, the mission of St. John was to bear witness to the truth by speaking plainly, nothing but the truth. You see, without words, there can be no witness. So, John *spoke*, bearing witness of the One who was to come, because without speaking there is no witness, and John’s witness of CHRIST is true.

Know this then, there are two ways to be a false witness. One way is to lie, to speak untruths and distortions in the name of the truth. The other way to bear false witness is to be silent when we know the truth and are given an opportunity to speak it. Indeed, it is a false witness and a mark of shame when we, who are heirs of the great treasures of the Gospel and the Lutheran Reformation, the very truths of Holy Scripture, speak about CHRIST so very seldom—even to our loved ones.

You see, St. John the Baptist was, and indeed, still is, CHRIST’s witness, and as a Christian, so too my friends, are you, but what does your witness say about *your* faith? What does the meager attendance at this service, or even the attendance on any given Sunday morning say about all of us who call ourselves children of God?

What do the people of our local communities learn about the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST, about God’s promise of life and salvation, by watching us and listening in on our Advent devotion? Do they see a people eagerly looking forward to our LORD’s second Advent in glory, a coming that could come at any day or hour? Will they repent and watch and pray with us? Will they recognize that we are celebrating the Incarnation of the one true God at Christmas? Will they hear that God reached down to dwell with us as a Baby Boy named JESUS, the true SON of God, who was born of a Virgin Mother, who was cradled in a manger, who nestled at His mother’s breast, and was rocked in her loving arms all *“for us... and for our salvation?”* Will they know that this same God in the Flesh, who once came to us in an animal stall in Bethlehem, comes now in the preaching of a simple pastor, in the bread and wine of the Supper, and in the water of Baptism? How can they possibly know that, unless someone tells them; unless you testify to the Light who has shined into the darkness of your hearts?

You see, the Church’s task is now, as it always has been, to preach the message of Saint John the Baptist to her own age, to prepare people for the visible second coming of the CHRIST by teaching and baptizing, and thrusting aside everything else that gets in the way.

But that, my friends, is going to take a witnessing church, a congregation of great courage and conviction—a congregation that bears witness to the Light in the way that St. John bore witness to the Light. It will take a congregation that does not care what people think of her, a congregation that has faith that God will take care of the bottom line of success, with a focus and intensity that is confident in God who called and sent her and knowing the sole purpose for which she is called and sent. It will take Christians who are willing to lose everything, including

their very own lives or freedom, if needs be, for the sake of testifying to God's great mercy in our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

St. John the Baptist has much to teach the Church today, and we have much to learn from him. He did not come to serve the idle whims of men. He did not come to massage the felt needs of the Judean community or pander to their Messianic expectations. Nor was he called to satisfy their religious curiosity and answer all their questions.

John was not afraid to upset the religious status quo, to ruffle a few feathers, to make people uncomfortable. He entered the dark wilderness of this world's sin and called all Israel to repentance without distinction, Jew or Gentile, prostitutes, priests, and kings. He even called the religious authorities, the Pharisees and the Sadducees to repentance, and when they balked at being washed in the same water with a bunch of filthy sinners, St. John called them a hypocritical brood of vipers and sons of the devil.

Clearly, John the Baptist did not set out to win friends and influence people. He did set out, however, to proclaim the coming of the One greater than he, whose sandals he was unworthy to loose, the One who is both SAVIOR and Judge, the One who is LORD of all, and if that made him more enemies than friends, then so be it.

John was not afraid to antagonize when necessary, to swim against the prevailing currents of popular opinion, to speak out where others were politely silent; he was not afraid to stick out in a crowd. No indeed! St. John the Baptist was a voice and a mouth and a finger.

He was a Voice calling out in the wilderness, calling all to repentance, *"Make straight the way of the LORD. Repent. Confess your sins. Be baptized."* He was a mouth preaching the coming of the One greater than he, who would baptize with the fire of the HOLY SPIRIT. John was a finger pointing across the deathly wilderness of sin to the only Blood Sacrifice that matters, who came to save John and all people from sin, death, and hell—a finger pointing to JESUS, the very *"Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*

So it is, that your mouths are to be opened, your fingers point, and your voices are to be heard as you live out your confession of faith in CHRIST JESUS, as you stop worrying about what others might think of you, and start worrying about what others think and say about JESUS. Your mouths will be opened as you remember your Baptism, that in it you are buried with CHRIST into His death. For you were *"Therefore buried with Him through Baptism into death..."* and raised again with Him to newness of life.

Therefore, it is no longer you who lives; it is CHRIST, who now lives in you! Knowing this, know also that you have nothing to fear. Therefore, confess boldly, for you have nothing to lose that you have not already lost. The worst that could happen to you already happened to your LORD, JESUS. What is there left in this world to fear? And if others reject your testimony, your witness of JESUS, what of it? They have not rejected you; they have rejected CHRIST who sent you.

We Christians have the most wonderful story to tell, indeed, the greatest story ever told. We bring glad tidings of great joy for all people. Freedom for the captives. Release for the prisoners. Healing for the broken. Joy in place of sadness. We point to the SAVIOR, to our LORD JESUS—crucified, risen, reigning, and one day soon, returning. He has anointed you in your Baptism that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

You are sent by God to testify. You, like St. John the Baptist, are a voice, a mouth, a pointing finger calling your friends, your neighbors, and your loved ones, out of their comfort zone, out of their wilderness of sin and unbelief, to receive the gifts of JESUS CHRIST, the SAVIOR, pointing them to Baptism, to the Word, to the Supper. Through His Church, *through you*, God is preparing a people for the Day of JESUS' second advent so that they too, will be able to hear Him say, *"I forgive you all your sins."*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

✠ ✠ ✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠ ✠ ✠

Rev. Raymond D. Parent II
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church
Crestview, Florida
12/18/22 A✠D