



BIBLE STUDY

Advent, 2016

John the Baptist The Preaching of John

OVERVIEW

John the Baptist is the great character of Advent. He came before Jesus to prepare the way. He preached repentance, baptized in the Jordan River, and was arrested and murdered for his faithful work. According to Jesus, John was the greatest of the prophets (see Matthew 11:11), but John says, "He [Jesus] must increase, and I must decrease," (John 3:30).

In fact, the church has most often painted and pictured John in the Jordan River pointing to Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

In this study we consider the **promise of John** in the Old Testament, and the **birth of John**.

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Introduction: John preached repentance. His words were as harsh as his clothes and diet. His whole person is a preaching of the law, but this for the purpose for faith and salvation. John points to Christ, to the life and salvation that comes from His death and resurrection. John's greatest preaching happens when Jesus comes to the bank of the Jordan River, and John, pointing to Him, says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," (John 1:29). As we hear the preach of John the Baptist we also behold Jesus, who takes away our sin.

Opening Psalm: 85:8-13

⁸Let me hear what God the | LORD will speak,*
for he will speak peace to his people, to his
saints;
but let them not turn back to | folly.

⁹**Surely his salvation is near to those who |
fear him,*
that glory may dwell | in our land.**

¹⁰Steadfast love and faith- | fulness meet;*
righteousness and peace kiss each | other.

¹¹**Faithfulness springs up | from the ground,*
and righteousness looks down | from the
sky.**

¹²Yes, the LORD will give | what is good,*
and our land will yield its | increase.

¹³**Righteousness will go be- | fore him*
and make his foot- | steps a way.
Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

Read Mark 1:1-5

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke begin with the birth of Jesus, but Mark begins thirty years later with the jarring preaching of John the Baptist.

Compare the prophecy of Isaiah (in 1:2-3) with the description of John's work (1:4-5). How is John preparing the way for Jesus? According to 1:4, what is the purpose of John's baptizing?

Read Mark 1:6

It is good to read the Scriptures with our imagination, and try to "see" the words. This verse is an especially vivid description of John. What do you "see"?

Read Mark 1:7-8

John is preaching Christ, not himself. What does he say in these verses about Jesus and His work?

Read Luke 3:7-18

Mark gives us a summary of John's preaching. Luke, in this text, gives us more of John's preaching.

How does John address the crowd (3:7)? What does this mean?

Could you summarize the preaching in 3:8-9? Notice that there is a distinction between "repentance" and the "fruit of repentance." Repentance consists of sorrow over sin and faith in the promise of the forgiveness of sins. The fruit of repentance are the good works that follow faith.

According to 3:10-14, what are some of the fruits of repentance?

Notice in these verses that John does not tell soldiers to stop being soldiers or tax collectors to quit their jobs. This is a key passage for our Biblical understanding of vocation. We serve God in the jobs that the Lord has given us. Holiness does not consist in leaving the world, but in serving our neighbors according to the Ten Commandments.

In 3:15-17 John addresses the question regarding his office. The people were tempted to think of John as the Messiah. How does he address this concern?

Read John 1:19-28

The questions about who John is are fleshed out most clearly in these questions. A delegation comes from the Pharisees to ask John about his office and work. The delegation asks John six different questions (1:19-23) about who he is. How does John answer?

In 1:25 the delegation asks about John's authority, and how he can baptize. How does John answer?

Read John 1:29-30

At last Jesus comes to John, and John, seeing him, preaches one of the most beautiful and succinct sermons in the Scripture: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

The background to this sermon is the sacrificial worship given to Moses, and especially the Scapegoat. In Leviticus 16 the Lord established the Day of Atonement. Among the other rites of that day, the High Priest would take a goat/lamb, place its hands on its head and speak the sins of Israel, and then drive it into the wilderness, indicating that the lamb was carrying away the sins of the people. How does this help us understand the sermon of John the Baptist (1:29)?

(We remember that the entire sacrificial worship of Israel was preaching the Gospel. Every time an Israelite offered a sacrifice they would know that the Lord is accepting the death of another in their place, and they would rejoice. It is Jesus, at last, who takes our place under the wrath of God. He is our substitute who makes atonement for all of our sins.)

This sermon of John the Baptist has made it into the regular prayers of the church. In the Common Service the congregation sings the following after the Words of Institution before coming to the Lord's Supper:

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; have

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mercy on us.

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; grant us Your peace, grant us Your peace.

How is this hymn an adaptation of the preaching of John? (For example, this is a prayer addressed directly to Jesus.)



Read John 3:23-36

As John's work is coming to a close he directs his disciples and followers to Jesus. John, after all, is a preacher of Jesus.

What is the concern of John's disciples (3:26)? How does John address this concern (3:27-28)?

What does John call himself in 3:29? According to this verse, what is John's joy? John's summary thoughts regarding himself and Jesus are in 3:30. How is this helpful for pastors? For all Christians?

Consider again 3:36. How does this teaching of John teach us repentance? Faith? How does it comfort us?

Closing Hymn: Comfort, Comfort Ye My People (TLH 61)
by Johann Olearius, 1635-1711, tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1829-1878

2. Yea, her sins our God will pardon,
Blotting out each dark misdeed;
All that well deserved His anger
He no more will see or heed.
She hath suffered many a day,
Now her griefs have passed away;
God will change her pining sadness
Into ever-springing gladness.

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