

Season of ADVENT



Prayers

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For the testimony of John the Baptist, that his proclamation concerning the coming of our Saviour, Christ the Lord, would be heard throughout the wilderness of this world, that those who hear it would receive the gift of salvation, and that we would be filled with zeal to also share this Christmas message with those around us so that they, too, may be filled with joy and hope, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For the Church on earth, that her members would rejoice always in their salvation, pray without ceasing and bear witness about the light of the world that is Jesus Christ, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those who are preparing to serve the Church as pastors and deacons that they would be diligent in their studies, faithful to their callings and a blessing to those they will come to serve, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those that God has appointed to civic leadership, that they would govern wisely, administer justice fairly and not abuse the authority that has been granted them, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those traveling this season to celebrate the Nativity with family and friends, that they reach their destinations safely, that their time with loved ones be joyful, and that they return home without incident, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those who are hungry, homeless, unemployed or find themselves in any kind of need, that they find food, shelter and employment and come to know and confess God as the giver of daily bread, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those who are ill, those recovering and those who are homebound, that they find comfort, healing, patience and the sure knowledge that Jesus will never leave them or forsake them, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those who mourn, that they find comfort in the promise of the resurrection from the dead and the hope of reunion with those they love who have died in the faith, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Collect of the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 126
(antiphon v. 5)
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 345
Other Hymns – 338 (OT), 349
(OT), 354 (OT), 346 (G), 333



ADVENT SERMON

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT DECEMBER 13 2020

Sermon Text: John 1:6-8; 19-28

'The One Person To Get It All Done'

John 1:6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 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." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 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." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

There's a lot riding on one person in many a household at this time of year. And no, I don't mean the jolly fellow in the red suit. He really doesn't do it alone after all. He's got a whole team of elves, eight tiny reindeer, Rudolph with his nose so bright, and according to J.R.R. Tolkien – the North Polar Bear "to get'er all done." No, even Santa Claus, doesn't do it all – unlike that poor person in many a home who at this time of year is wishing that there was an app on their iPhone for magical elf-help . . . or express reindeer service . . . or a red-nose GPS.

One person to do all the gift buying, the gift wrapping, the cleaning, the cooking, the baking, the decorating, the hosting and attending of an endless series of events. One person who's got to do all of that . . . while still working, getting the kids off to school, taking them to hockey, dance class, and various other activities. One person who's got to do all that and then have to clean up after the dog who messed on the kitchen floor. One person who's got the whole weight of Christmas resting on their shoulders. That's the way that it is in many a household. Even when there are two people trying to do it all together? Well, at one time or another one of them will still feel like they're carrying it all. You can tell which person that is by just cheerfully telling them how many days there are until the big day . . . and you'll be about as popular as the dog who made a mess on the kitchen floor.

Some deal with this by simply shoving all the hoopla out the door. They refuse to let Christmas be about all of that, which has a certain profound truth to it . . . something all of us need to remember, even as we piously try to highlight the true greatness of this season whether it be with a little or a lot of hoopla. "The Word was made flesh" after all – and that is something worthy of a little celebrating and hoopla. A Saviour was born for us who is Christ the Lord . . . that event certainly worthy of a little merry-making and feasting. Others handle it by getting going early – having all their presents bought and wrapped by July and the tree up and decorated in November. And, yes, there is a certain wisdom to that, as much as others might roll their eyes at it.

Regardless, however, there is one person in the household who's got to carry it all. One person who's got Christmas riding on their shoulders. One person who throughout the year can often feel that way about the rest of life as well. And yes, it's easy for us to become that one person, whether it be at home, at work or even at church. It's easy to feel like it's all resting on us. It's easy because sinners are good at trying to be that "one person." It's the lie that we bought into in Eden . . . and have been living under its crushing burden ever since. The lie was Satan's. The crushing burden, however, was, in effect, God's gift. The lie turned us away from the One on whom everything really depends. The crushing burden was given to turn us back to Him. And yes, God can even work the late December panic for our good as He helps us see that we can't carry it all, that our shoulders aren't broad enough to carry all of Christmas or any other part of life for that matter.

One person who has to carry it all. One person who's got Christmas riding on His shoulders alone. One person who throughout the rest of the year has got to do it all, too. And in His mercy God sends John the Baptizer to us today in order

to turn our eyes to that One person. And not, it isn't John; for as he himself says, "I am not the Christ, not Elijah, not the Prophet." To be sure, John had a lot to do. He was sent to prepare the way of the Lord – to make His paths straight. He had no team of elves or eight tiny reindeer or bright-nosed Rudolph either. And there was no North Polar Bear in the wilderness of the Jordan that's for sure. But John didn't need all of them for the work that he was sent to do. Not because he was up to the task. No, not even as the greatest man born of woman could he do it. No, John, didn't need elves or reindeer because He had the Holy Spirit who came upon him when he was still in his mother's womb and who kept him in the truth that he was not the One, not the Light; but only sent to bear witness to the Light.

And John did only what he was sent to do – to "baptize with water." There was, after all, another One coming after him, a mightier One whose sandal he was not worthy to stoop down and untie. He was the only one who could and who would do it all – atone for sin, destroy the works of the devil. And the Spirit kept John in his vocation – his calling as "the voice of one crying out in the wilderness." John doesn't take up what isn't his to carry. He let's the coming Lord be the Lord; and simply pours the water that he is given to pour and preaches the Word that he is given to preach. With so many pointing the finger at him, it would have been a great temptation to turn his finger to his own chest and let it become about him and what he had to do. But no, in and through the Spirit he keeps that finger directed away from Himself and towards Jesus. Yes, it all rests on Jesus – Jesus and no one else, the one person to get it all done.

And that same Spirit who came to John in his mother's womb and kept him in the truth comes to you today. He comes in the Word that is read and proclaimed so that you, too, might be kept in the truth. He calls you to repent of all those times when you have let the devil's lie turn your finger toward your own chest and have allowed the weight of home, work, church, or even Christmas to rest on your poor shoulders. Not only is this a great impiety toward the Lord, but it is also a cruel thing to do to yourself. It is a lie. And the Holy Spirit point it out to you and in you so that you might repent of it and be set free in the truth of Christ's lordship over everything – your home, your work, your church, and yes, even Christmas.

All we can do is, like John, pour the water that we have been given to pour and with the Spirit's help keep our finger pointed at Jesus whenever we are tempted to turn it toward ourselves. To be sure, such is not the easiest thing in the world to do. There always seems to be something we have to do, things we worry about and our preoccupied with – a tree waiting to be cut down, brought into our

home and decorated for Christmas; Christmas gifts to be bought and wrapped; cookies and cakes baked for the holiday season. How hard it is to simply let God be God. It was Martin Luther who once offered this word of advice: “Pray and let God worry.” To be sure, stuff still need to get done. But how much better, how much more joy in it all when you’ve got your eyes and heart fixed on Jesus – the One, the only One, who gets it all done.

And which is why our Lord comes to us still today in His flesh and blood. Present among us to draw our eyes and hearts to Himself, to direct our finger away from ourselves to Him. At the altar He proclaims to us again the truth that His shoulders alone have carried it all for us –home, work, church, and yes, even Christmas. Carries all of life for us even as He carried the burden of all our sins and failures on the cross of Calvary. “I was made man,” He says to us today, “in order to have the shoulders so that I could do this for you, so that I could carry it all for you. I know how weary you are. I know how heavy it is because I have already borne it all. Now, just hand it all over to me. Let me bear it for you now. Let me be the One who does all that I want to do through you. It is not your burden to bear, but mine. Let me be who I am . . . your Lord and Your God, Your Saviour, the One who gets it all done.” Amen.