

Rorate coeli  
St. John 1:19-28  
December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Augusta, GA  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

It Is He, Who Coming After Me, Is Preferred

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

St. John the Baptist prepares us for our Lord's coming. He prepares us to celebrate our Lord's incarnation in the flesh. How does he do this? He prepares us for our Lord's coming by pointing away from himself, and pointing all our faith and attention upon the Lord + Jesus, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. St. John the Baptist is the herald of the Lord + Jesus. He is the one who blows the trumpet announcing the arrival of the King of kings. He is the voice that tells all those who hear and believe to look away from their good works, and their sinful actions, to the Lord + Jesus Who fulfilled the Law for them and suffered their punishment on the tree of the holy cross.

St. John the Baptist was sent by the Lord God to prepare the way for the Messiah. He was sent to the Jews to preach repentance toward the forgiveness of sins. He was sent to baptize with water; establishing a physical sign that all those who needed to be baptized were spiritually unclean, but through the waters of baptism were symbolically cleansed of their impurity and sin. He was sent to the people of God to make them ready to receive the Lord + Jesus Christ. However, the people of Israel—the Jews—did not receive him and his preaching.

Therefore, the priests and Levites sent emissaries to St. John the Baptist to question him about what he was doing and preaching. Is he the Christ? Is he Elijah? Is he the Prophet? The answer to all three questions is, "No. He is not." He is not the Christ, he is the one who prepares the way for the Christ, and points us to the Christ—our Lord + Jesus. He is not Elijah. He is not Elijah raised from the dead, or even the soul of Elijah placed into another body. No, he is Elijah in a spiritual sense. He preaches the same message as Elijah, as the angel Gabriel foretold to his father Zacharias, "*He will go before Him [the Lord + Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elijah.*" The preaching of Elijah was meant to turn the hearts of unbelievers into hearts filled with faith in the Lord God. Therefore, he is not the Elijah that the Jews were thinking of when they asked their question. Nor is St. John the Baptist the Prophet. He was not the Prophet promised to come to the people of Israel after the death of Moses, who would fulfill the same role that Moses filled—be the intermediary between the Lord God and His people.

St. John the Baptist denies that he is any of those things. His only desire is to point those who came with questions to the Messiah. In his mind he is nothing. What does he call himself? "A voice." A

voice is something that cannot be touched. You cannot place a voice on a mantle. You cannot hug a voice, or point to a voice and say, "Look at that voice." A voice is nothing tangible. This is how St. John the Baptist describes himself. He is a voice crying in the wilderness. A voice may not be able to be touched, but it can be heard. His voice was a cry—a shout! His voice was a shout to all who could hear that the Messiah was standing among them. The Messiah—the Christ—had come. St. John the Baptist proclaimed loudly that the Messiah had come. Just as he did from his mother's womb, through the voice of his mother Elizabeth, who proclaimed with a loud voice the blessings that were bestowed upon the Virgin Mary.

However, his preaching was rejected. He did not preach the Messiah that they wanted. They wanted a Christ who would come with a great army, and with much pomp and circumstance, and defeat their earthly enemies. But this is not how the Christ comes. He comes lowly, poorly, humbly, born in a cattle stall. He comes as a man—a poor man—and not dressed in fine clothes. He comes triumphantly into Jerusalem not on a horse with a full army, but on a donkey—on a borrowed donkey at that. He does not come as the Christ that the Jews desired, and for that both his herald—St. John the Baptist—and Him are distained by the priests, Levites, Pharisees and religious leaders of His day. He is rejected by the Jews, and still is to this day.

St. John the Baptist is not concerned by this, however. He still points the Jews to the Lord + Jesus. He still points away from himself. Even his work of baptizing is just a sign of a greater baptism to come—a baptism of the Holy Ghost. The same baptism that we all have been baptized with when the Name of the Lord was given to us with the words, "*In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.*" St. John the Baptist's baptism only symbolically cleansed those of their sins. The Lord's baptism spiritually cleanses us of all our sins. We have His righteousness placed upon us, so that we bear His righteousness; we bear all of His works and merits through the faith that the Holy Ghost creates in us.

Therefore, St. John the Baptist must point us to the Lord + Jesus and away from himself. For he is nothing, but the Lord + Jesus is everything. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is our salvation from sin, death and the devil. He fulfills the Law which we are unable to do. He sacrifices Himself in our place and bears our punishment. He should be our One and Only focus. He should be the One to Whom we direct all of our faith. We should, like St. John the Baptist, constantly point away from ourselves—point away from our works, our thoughts, our words—and place all our trust in our salvation in Him. He is the One Whose sandal straps we are unworthy to loose.

It is especially important for us to do this in these times. For, just as it was in St. John the Baptist's day that men rejected the Christ, and looked for a Savior in all sorts of other men and objects, the same is true today as well. People are constantly looking to their good works; to their own virtues and status among man. This is the most natural thing for us to do, is compare our works to the works of our neighbor. How often do we come out on top in that debate within ourselves. We see ourselves as far better than anybody else. We are better drivers. We are better husbands. We are better fathers. Our children are better kids than our neighbors.

Perhaps, it is even true; that we are better than our neighbors, friends, co-workers and families. But, before the Lord + Jesus we should hold ourselves in all unworthiness. When we live holy lives, mankind will praise us, even as we praise ourselves. Our holy lives, however, does not do a single thing to effect our salvation. We should lead holy lives so that we are not distained by our fellow man and bring shame upon ourselves as Christians or upon the Christian Church. But, a holy life is not going to bring you salvation. You are not saved by your good works.

St. John the Baptist was the greatest of prophets. He lived a life dedicated to preaching and preparing for the coming of the Messiah. But he does not consider himself worthy to unloose the sandal

straps of the Lord + Jesus. He recognizes his place. He understands that salvation is outside of himself. He knows that salvation is found in the Christ—in His works, in His merits, in His sacrifice for us on the tree of the holy cross. St. John the Baptist knows that he is just a voice crying in the wilderness to make strait the way of the Lord. He is just the trumpet herald that announces the coming of the King.

Our focus in these dark times should be on that King of Kings. Our faith should be firmly grounded in what our Lord + Jesus has done for us. We should joy alone in that our sins are forgiven on account of Him and Him alone. This should also be our focus during this time of Advent, when the world want to draw our attention away from Him, and place it Christmas trees, and dinners, and cookies, and Santa Claus, and reindeer, and a host of other things that have absolutely nothing to do with the birth of our Lord God into the flesh of our Lord + Jesus Christ.

My dear friends, do not let the world draw you away from the worship of the One, True Lord and Savior, + Jesus, the Christ. Do not let the world draw you into trusting in your good deeds, or draw you away from the One and Only Lord Who deserves all of our attention and faith. For, we are indeed unworthy on account of our sin to unloose the straps of the Lord + Jesus.

However, He comes to us—indeed He standing among us in His Body and Blood given in bread and wine—to free us from the bondage of sin, and lead us into our eternal home in Heaven. Hear the voice proclaim to you today, “Look not at your works. Look not at your sinfulness. Look to the Lord + Jesus hanging on the cross fulfilling the Law for you, and enduring your punishment, so that you might have the rewards that He suffers for: forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.” Keep your faith and focus on Him. He will draw you to Himself and cleanse you of all your sins. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*