

Rorate coeli
St. John 1:19-28
December 22nd, 2019
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, it is meet and right that we should give thanks unto Thee, that Thou hast given us a more glorious baptism than that of John the Baptist, and hast therein promised us the remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and everlasting life through Thy Son, Jesus Christ: Preserve us, we beseech Thee, in such faith in Thy grace and mercy, that we may never doubt Thy promise, but be comforted by the same in all temptations: and grant us Thy Holy Spirit that we may renounce sin, and ever continue in the righteousness bestowed upon us in baptism, until by Thy grace we obtain eternal salvation, through the same, Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

We have come to the last Sunday in Advent. This Sunday in Advent points us to our Lord's coming more than any other during this season. We have in our reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. John the figure of St. John the Baptist. The last time we encountered him on Wednesday, he was still only in the sixth month of dwelling in his mother Elizabeth's womb. In that Gospel from the first chapter of the Evangelist St. Luke, St. John the Baptist leaped for joy at the arrival of the Lord + Jesus Christ, six months his younger, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Today, we see St. John the Baptist fully grown and in the very midst of his office of preparing the way of the Lord + Jesus. This is what he does: he points the way to our Lord + Jesus. The Pharisees send emissaries from Jerusalem to find out if St. John the Baptist is the Christ. The ones who were sent we are told were priests and Levites from Jerusalem. Now, why is this so important? Well, who was St. John the Baptist? Who were his parents? His father was a chief priest. He was of the division of Abijah. Who was Abijah? The first high priest Aaron, the brother of Moses, had four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Nadab and Abihu were the two sons of Aaron who offered unholy incense before the Lord (that is incense for which the Lord God did not ask or require) and they died without having any descendants. The other two sons of Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar, ministered as priests before the Lord God. Eleazar was the high priest as was all his descendants.

At the time of King David Zadok who was the high priest, being a descendant of Eleazar and Ahimelech, the chief descendant of Ithamar divided the work of the priests into twenty-four divisions. These divisions were named for the existing twenty-four descendants of Eleazar and Ithamar. Sixteen of these divisions were from the house of Eleazar and the other eight from the house of Ithamar. The divisions were assigned by lot (when they would serve in the temple) and the eighth lot fell to Abijah.

What all this means is that Zechariah was a descendant of Aaron. He was a chief priest. And so, St. John the Baptist was also a descendant of the Aaron the high priest. Furthermore, his mother Elizabeth was also from the daughters of Aaron. In other words, St. John the Baptist has a very good pedigree and he was a Levite and a descendant of chief priests. The priests and Levites that were sent from Jerusalem to inquire of St. John the Baptist would have at least known his family, and more than likely known who he was, possibly growing up with him.

He is not some stranger to them. So, it begs the question, “Why are they asking, ‘who are you?’?” The answer of St. John the Baptist reveals their intention. They want to know if he is the Christ, the One coming from God to redeem His people. He does not lie, or deceive, or deny who he is but plainly states that he is not the Christ. He is the one who points the way to the Christ. He is “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’” And this is what St. John the Baptist does for us today. He prepares us to receive our Lord + Jesus.

In three days, we will celebrate the birth of our Lord God in the flesh of the Lord + Jesus Christ. God is born as man. We prepare for His coming by hearing His Word preached into our ears. The Prophet Isaiah was sung by us in the Introit. *Rorate coeli*, that is, Rain down from Heaven. Our salvation rains down from Heaven. With all the rain we have had lately this should be an easy image for us to understand. When it rains it does not just rain in one spot. Rain does not just fall on one or two people. It rains everywhere you can see, unless by some unlikely chance you are standing right where the rain begins and ends; the edge of the rain cloud. This is why the Prophet Isaiah uses this image to describe our Lord’s arrival in the flesh. He comes down to Earth to save all mankind.

Our Lord + Jesus, the Son of God, is born in the flesh of man for all mankind. He is born into our flesh for us. His grace and mercy and salvation are abundant and covers over all the earth. When He comes the skies pour down His righteousness upon us. We who cling to Him in faith are clothed with His righteousness. Indeed, we are immersed in His righteousness. We are washed in His righteousness. We are drenched in His righteousness through the waters of Holy Baptism. Our Lord’s righteousness rains down upon our Old Adam, dirty with sin, and he is drowned and killed, so that a new Adam arises to live before God clothed in the righteousness of the Christ.

St. John the Baptist baptized with water, but he Lord + Jesus has baptized us with water and the Holy Ghost. His Holy Ghost has been poured out upon us so that we are no longer stained with sin. St. John the Baptist’s baptism was a foreshadowing of the Holy Baptism that our Lord + Jesus instituted for us. The Pharisees, through the priests and Levites of Jerusalem sent by them, question St. John the Baptist’s baptism. Why are you doing this if you are not the Christ? His baptism prepares the way for the Christ. His baptism is only a sign and shadow. The baptism of the Lord + Jesus is a life-giving bath. It does not just make a person physically clean like the baptism of St. John the Baptist, but it makes all those who are baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost spiritually cleansed of sin, and filled with the Holy Ghost and faith, and clothed with the righteousness of the Christ.

St. John the Baptist is here today to point us to the Christ. His preaching of repentance toward the remission of sins is carried on today as preachers continue to preach repentance of sins toward the remission of your sins. Through the pure preaching of the Word of God, the way of the Lord is prepared in the hearts of all those who hear and believe and cling to the Savior + Jesus Christ. The Lord + Jesus will appear in our Propers as a tiny Baby born in Bethlehem in a few days. God will come to us as a man. But our Lord + Jesus continues to wrap Himself in fleshly ways and means as He comes to us in water, Word and in bread and wine. He comes to us through these means to grant us remission of all our sins, and adorn us in His righteousness. All this He does through His Bride, the Church, so that He might come to us on the Last Day, and bring us to our eternal home in Heaven.

The end of the Advent season is at hand. The time for the pointing forward of the finger of St. John the Baptist to the coming Christ is ending. For now He is come. Our Lord + Jesus is come to us. He came as a Baby in a manger. And He comes to us in His means of grace. Let us go to meet our Lord + Jesus where He is to be found, just as the crowds went to meet St. John the Baptist beyond the Jordan River in Bethabara. Our Lord + Jesus is found in His Word and in His Sacraments. These gifts are for you. They cleanse you of your sins, and clothe you with the righteousness of the Christ. Your old garments of sin and shame have been put off of you through faith, and you are now clean and free from sin.

Rejoice greatly, my dear children! "Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, rejoice!" For your salvation is close at hand. He is at the door. He comes to redeem you with His Blood and free you from the bondage of sin, death and the devil. And He will come on the Last Day to take you and all those who believe on His Name to our eternal home in Heaven. May the Lord God Almighty grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, we give Thee hearty thanks that for a comfort to us poor sinners Thou hast ordained and sent Thy Son as a righteous King and Savior to redeem His people from sins, from the power of the devil, and from eternal death; and We most heartily beseech Thee, so enlighten and govern us by Thy Holy Spirit that we may ever know and confess Christ to be our King and Savior, and, firmly trusting in Him alone, obtain eternal life; through the same Thy dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!