

Rorate coeli
St. John 1:19-28
December 20th, 2020
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Evangelical Lutheran Mission, 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:

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.

When one considers the pedigree of St. John the Baptist it is not surprising that the priests and Levites would be sent by the Pharisees from Jerusalem to see whether or not he was the Christ. St. John the Baptist is himself a Levite. He is from a priestly family. His father Zacharias was a chief priest; a descendant of the first high priest Aaron. Zacharias, we are told by the Evangelist St. Luke, was of the division of Abijah; one of the priestly divisions created by King David in order to divide up the duties of the temple. Even his mother, Elizabeth, we are told by the Evangelist St. Luke, was of the lineage of the first high priest Aaron.

St. John the Baptist was from a priestly family, the son of a chief priest, whose mother was also a descendant of Aaron. His pedigree speaks for itself. Among the Jews he would have been considered to have the right background. This was the type of person that the Jews desired and expected the Messiah to be. This was the type of pedigree and background that the Jews, especially the Pharisees who sent the priests and Levites to St. John the Baptist, expected the Messiah to have. It is no wonder that they wonder if he is the Christ. This is the type of man that they would prefer to have as a Messiah—as a Christ—the Anointed One of God.

When the priests and Levites come, however, they do not ask directly if he is the Christ. Instead, they ask, “Who are you?” First of all, St. John the Baptist growing up in a priestly family; being a descendant of Levi and of Aaron the first high priest, these men would have known who he was. He has probably grown up with some of these men. They would have known who he was. Therefore, it is a strange question. This is not some stranger living in the wilderness who they have never known. This is a person with whom they would have been familiar.

This is why St. John the Baptist does not answer their question. He does not say, "I am this or that person." No, he cuts right to the heart of their purpose for coming to him. He says, "I am not the Christ." He is not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. Who is St. John the Baptist? He is a voice. This voice cries in the wilderness the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "Make straight the way of the Lord." The Lord who is the Word, has His way prepared by the voice crying in the wilderness. The Word is preceded by the voice. The voice makes the way straight for the Word of God incarnate. This voice makes the way straight for the Word of God incarnate by preaching into the ears of those who have come to him in the wilderness that they are poor, miserable sinners in need of God's grace and mercy.

Poor, miserable sinners need to be cleansed of their sins. St. John the Baptist baptized with water. His baptism was symbolic only. He washed men's bodies and that represented their sins being washed away. The voice in the wilderness proclaimed that sinners should repent of their sins and be cleansed through ritual washing—through being baptized. This is how the voice prepared the way for the Word of God incarnate. He made men aware of their sinfulness, and made them aware that their salvation was to be found outside of themselves. Their salvation was not to be found in the voice. It was not to be found in St. John the Baptist. Even with his impressive pedigree and family background, he was not the Christ. He was not Elijah or the Prophet.

He was not the person of Elijah. This was a false Jewish belief that is called "transmogrification of the soul." It is the belief that the soul of Elijah, who did not die but was taken up into Heaven alive on the chariot of Heaven if you remember, his soul would inhabit the body of some new person born. This they believed to be the case with St. John the Baptist. But this is not what the Lord God intended. We learn from the angel Gabriel, recorded in the Evangelist St. Luke, that St. John the Baptist would come in the "spirit and power of Elijah." In other words, he would preach just as boldly and faithfully as Elijah did even though it seemed to him that he was the only one left who had not bowed the knee to Baal. The Lord God comforted Elijah by proclaiming to him that seven thousand in Israel had not bowed the knee to Baal. In the same that Elijah preached to sinful Israel, so too does St. John the Baptist. He boldly preaches repentance toward the forgiveness of sins.

He, however, was not the Christ. He was not the Word, but the voice; the voice that goes before the Word to make straight the path of the Lord. And even though according to his pedigree and background it would appear to the men sent from Jerusalem that he is to be the type of Messiah preferred, there was One standing among them, Who they did not know, Who was the Christ come into the world. The one preferred by the priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees in Jerusalem is not even worthy to untie the strap of this One's sandal. The voice only sounds the arrival of the Word. The Word—our Lord + Jesus Christ—puts into clear words what the voice prepared.

He is the One Who will bring a true cleansing away from sin. St. John the Baptist baptized with water, but the Lord + Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Ghost. We are washed in His Blood shed on the tree of the holy cross. We are washed with His atoning sacrifice for our sins. We who have been washed in the waters of Holy Baptism have forgiveness for our sins. Daily do we drown our sins in the waters of our Holy Baptisms. Daily do we drown the Old Adam with all of his sins and evil desires. We do this by daily repentance, that is, daily contrition, or sorrow over our sins, and faith in the promises of the Word made flesh, Who promises that in Holy Baptism we find a washing of regeneration and a renewal of the Holy Ghost, so that when we rise each new morning and make the sign of our Holy Baptism—the sign of the cross—upon our foreheads, we are reminded that by our Lord's crucifixion into which we were baptized, we have forgiveness of all our sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation promised as well.

This is why the Word is preferred to the voice. The voice only prepared the way of the Word of God incarnate. The Word does for us poor, miserable sinners what no one else can. He perfectly fulfills the Law and will of the Lord God. He pays the penalty for our sins by shedding His Blood on our behalf

on the tree of the holy cross. He washes us free from sin through that shed Blood, and then clothes us with the white robe of His righteousness. He bestows upon us His works and merits. We who are baptized have put on the Christ; we have put on His righteousness. His righteous works and merits cover over the abundance of our sins and sinfulness. The Word puts into words—His words and promises—what the voice prepared by making the way straight. The voice only sounds, the Word makes clear in clear words what the voice prepared.

The Word is to be preferred before the voice which comes before the Word, but mankind did not receive Him. St. John the Baptist's pedigree is impressive. Not so is the pedigree of our Lord + Jesus Christ. He was born to a lowly carpenter from the undesirable city of Nazareth. His mother was a lowly handmaiden. Certainly, He is the descendant of King David, since His parents were of the house and lineage of King David, but that kingly line had fallen into practical nothingness. There was nobody in that family that sat on thrones, or wore princely garments. Even the Lord + Jesus Christ's father and mother were a carpenter and a handmaiden. They did not even reside in Jerusalem, but lived in Nazareth. A place of which Nathaniel, when he was first called to be an Apostle, questioned whether anything good could come from there.

No, our Lord's pedigree is not the same as the pedigree of St. John the Baptist. But our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ is to be preferred before St. John the Baptist, for He is the Word of God incarnate. He has taken upon Himself our flesh. He has fulfilled the Law of God for us, and has paid our penalty by offering up His life on the tree of the holy cross. He went into our graves, in order that He might burst open the bonds of death, and win for us eternal life with Him and all the saints. All those who have been cleansed in His Blood through the waters of Holy Baptism, and those who through faith have put on His righteousness, will wear eternally the white robes of the Lamb Who takes away the sin of the whole world.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us cling in faith to the Word of God made flesh, and continue to listen to the voice of the Church, who prepares our hearts and minds to receive our Lord + Jesus by preaching into our ears that we are indeed poor, miserable sinners in need of His atoning sacrifice for us. The voice of the Church proclaims to us that our sins have been forgiven on account of the works and the merits of the Christ. We poor sinners may be unworthy to loosen the strap of the sandal of our Lord + Jesus, just like St. John the Baptist, but by His Word of redemption spoken into our ears He makes us worthy to receive Him.

We do not have the pedigree that St. John the Baptist has, neither did our Lord + Jesus, but we have been gifted with the promise of eternal life in Heaven with the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, and with all the saints who have gone before us, and all the angels who continually sing our Lord God's praise before His throne. Therefore, my dear friends, let us lift up the gates of our hearts, and let the King of Glory come in, for He has opened up the gates of Heaven for us, so that all the blessings of Heaven may rain down upon us. And the voice of the Church cries out in the wilderness of the world, "Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; Let the earth open her womb, and bring forth salvation." Our Lord + Jesus has come down from Heaven to us poor, miserable sinners to grant us forgiveness of our sins. 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!