

Rorate coeli
St. John 1:19-28
December 22nd, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
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.

Sermon Text:

“They said therefore unto him, ‘Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord,’ as said Isaiah the prophet.”

Prayer in Pulpit before 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.

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

My dear friends, you have most likely often heard me say that the season of Advent is the season of St. John the Baptist. He is the forerunner of the Christ. He is the one who prepares the way of the Lord. He prepares the way of the Lord + Jesus by proclaiming Him to the people. He prepares the way of the Lord + Jesus, the Christ by being the voice of one crying in the wilderness. This is no more true than in the last two Gospels of the Advent season. Last Sunday we heard St. John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord by sending two of his disciples to inquire of the Lord Who He was. Today, priests and Levites, and Pharisees are sent from Jerusalem to inquire about who St. John the Baptist is.

What an interesting time it must have been for those living in Israel. We learn from the fifth chapter of the Book of Acts that there were at that time several men who came forth claiming to be the Messiah. Gamaliel, one who was well respected among the Pharisees had spoken up in the council and declared that there had been one called Theudas, who gathered a group of about four hundred men with him. After he was killed the men then dispersed and the group was no more. Again, there came one named Judas, from Galilee. He lived around the time of the enrollment. This enrollment was the same enrollment that we will hear in the Gospel reading for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. When during the days of Quirinius being the governor of Syria, Caesar Augustus decreed that everyone should be enrolled in a census. This Judas of Galilee also gathered a group of men to join him, until he died, and again they dispersed and were no more.

So, when the forerunner, St. John the Baptist, appears, and before the Lord’s incarnation in our flesh, there were already false prophets coming into the land of Israel to deceive them into thinking the Messiah had come. In addition to the rise of false prophets prior to the Forerunner and the Christ, there

had also been the stories of the strange and miraculous births of these two men. We have been hearing about them during this Advent season. St. John the Baptist was born to Zacharias and Elisabeth, his wife, both who were “well stricken in years.” Elisabeth had been considered barren. Further, Zacharias had been stricken mute until the birth, circumcision, and naming of St. John. When he declared, in agreement with his wife Elisabeth, that the baby’s name was to be John, his lips were loosed, and he prophesied about this child. He would go before the Lord to prepare His way. The priests and Levites had to have known this about St. John, for Zacharias was a priest himself. Therefore, they had to have known St. John growing up.

There is also the strange and miraculous birth of our Lord, which we will hear about in the next couple of weeks. At His birth, only the shepherds are notified by the angel of the Lord. But they, having borne witness to the birth of the Savior, proclaimed that news to the whole countryside. And everyone marvelled at the news. Then, not long after, in the city of Jerusalem, wise men came from the east to inquire about a new King being born. We are told by St. Matthew, who records this narrative, that King Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled at the news.

The same wonder and marvel occurs forty days after our Lord’s birth when He is presented by His mother and father in the temple as a firstborn son. The Blessed Virgin Mary goes through the required purification rite that Moses established. And here comes Simeon and Anna, both proclaiming to all in the temple that day who would hear that the redemption of Israel was at hand.

Now it is about three decades later, our Lord and His Forerunner are thirty years old. But even though a few decades have passed, the events of a few decades ago are still in people’s memory. They have heard of strange births, and promises of a Savior being born; of redemption being at hand. They have also seen false Messiahs come, and go. It is, therefore, no wonder that the priests and the Levites are wondering about St. John the Baptist. Who is he? Is he the Christ? Is he Elijah? Is he the Prophet? Why is this man baptizing people in the Jordan River and preaching a Gospel of repentance toward the forgiveness of sins?

We are told by the Evangelists that many people were coming to St. John the Baptist to confess their sins and receive baptism. This is another marvelous thing about this time in history! St. John the Baptist preached repentance; he preached the Law so that men might see their sin and repent. And many saw their sin and repented, and were baptized by him as a symbol that their sins were washed away. It was only symbolic, because St. John’s baptism was only a baptism of water. Our Lord’s baptism, as St. John confesses in today’s Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. John, is a baptism of the Holy Ghost. Through baptism into our Lord’s Name, we receive the outpouring the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost lives in all those who are baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost creates and sustains faith in all those who cling in faith to their Holy Baptism.

This is the way it would be when the Lord, the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of the Lord came. St. John the Baptist prepares the way of the Lord. He is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. He is the one preaching repentance in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord. Cleanse your hearts and minds of your sin, and repent and confess your sins, and receive absolution from the Lord. No one had ever seen this before, and so it was strange to them. We receive the preaching of repentance whenever we come to this Lord’s house. So, it is not strange for us to hear about our sinfulness, see the sinfulness inside of us, and confess our sins and receive absolution. But these actions of St. John the Baptist were just one more level of wonder and marvel of the times.

Therefore, priests and Levites, and Pharisees, come to him to inquire about who he is. Last week, St. John had his disciples inquire about who the Lord + Jesus was. Was He the coming One? He was indeed! He was the One Who Isaiah had prophesied about. The One Who would give sight to

the blind, hearing to the death, life to the dead, health to the sick, and comfort to those who were poor in spirit. He was the One Who would bring redemption to all His people. He was the One Who would atone for the sins of the whole world. And so, St. John the Baptist prepares his own disciples by directing them to the true Messiah, the true Christ, to the Lord + Jesus.

He does the same thing today. Only this time men are asking him if he is the Christ. He boldly confesses that he is not. He is not the Christ. He is not Elijah, that is, he is not Elijah in the flesh come back down from Heaven. He has come in the power and authority of Elijah, but he is not Elijah. He is also not the Prophet, the one promised to Moses by the Lord God. The Prophet would be the One Whom the Lord God sent to be like unto Moses. The Prophet and the Christ were the same, but this knowledge was lost upon those who were sent to him. Having been witness to the events of the past few decades, they begin to wonder if St. John the Baptist is not like unto those who had come before. Those who claimed to be something they were not.

St. John the Baptist confesses and does not deny that he is not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. He is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. Just as Isaiah had prophesied. He is the one who prepares the way of the Lord. He prepares the way of the Lord during this Advent season for us. For he comes preaching repentance toward the forgiveness of sins. He comes imploring us to repent of our sins, so that with clean hearts and minds we may receive the gift of our Lord + Jesus. The Lord + Jesus comes to us in our flesh. He comes to be the One Who perfectly fulfills the Law of the Lord God for us poor, miserable sinners. He is the One Who comes to atone for our sins upon the tree of the holy cross.

This is why St. John the Baptist, nor we, are worthy to unloose the latchet of His shoes, for we are unable to redeem ourselves from our transgressions. But the true Messiah, the One Who St. John the Baptist prepares the way of, has won for us forgiveness, life, and salvation, and He bestows these great gifts to us in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Let us therefore, my dear friends, hear the voice of the one crying in this wilderness of sin and shame. Let us confess our sins, and receive absolution, and rejoice that our Lord and Savior has washed us clean and pure from our sins and transgressions by the waters of Holy Baptism. He has come in our flesh to redeem us from sin and death. He has come to rain down righteousness upon us. Let us rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice, for the Lord is at hand. The time of our redemption has drawn near. Let us give Him thanks and praise forever and ever. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the 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!