

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John the Apostle, but the synoptics have complimentary info on John the Baptizer and his work. The appointed reading for Advent 4 in the TLH one-year lectionary is the second chunk of this week's text; John 1:19-28. Today's reading in its entirety is the reading appointed for Advent 3B in the LW three-year lectionary.

In addition to this reading from John, both LW and LSB appoint John 1:1-14, which overlaps the first chunk of this week's reading, to be read on Christmas Dawn (morning) and on Christmas Day, respectively. As was the case last week, the focus of this week's reading is deliberately on John the Baptizer, particularly upon his work of baptizing.

The construction of this first chapter reads like a book from David Halberstam or another author of the *New Journalism* school, as the author goes back and forth between talking about Jesus and talking about John. The first five verses of John's Gospel are about Jesus. Now, in vv. 6-8, he talks about John. Then, in vv. 9-18 he talks about Jesus.

Finally, in vv. 19-28, he talks about John. After that, it's all about Jesus.

Matthew (11: 2-29) and Luke (7: 18-35) bring John B back into the picture later on.

The people who decide which Bible are to be read on which Sunday have decided to give us these two chunks, both about John B, making the focus to be deliberately on John and taking our focus deliberately away from Jesus. John would not have been happy about that, and neither am I. John is doing what Halberstam et al do, and you take that away.

The author constructs the narrative in a way that makes what he says more interesting, so it helps to keep the attention of the reader, or the listener, and that's a good thing. We've all been on the receiving end as well as the giving end of talking. I know that interesting is better than not for the hearer or listener. Or you could teach them how to listen.

New Journalism is a way of writing that I will use all the time in writing a sermon, and it's a way of writing that has been used by good writers from ancient times to the present, including God and Jesus. I was joking about teaching people how to listen to a sermon. Pastors say that, putting the burden onto the sheep, but it's not theirs. It's ours.

That way of writing or speaking is being rediscovered by those who use the style to write non-fiction in a way that makes it much more readable, providing ample evidence that history not only doesn't have to be boring, but if written about correctly history is absolutely riveting. Good preaching, with God as our material, should also be that.

One of the principles of that kind of writing is the inclusion of shifting scenes and use of different characters, moving from one location to another and then back, moving from one person to another and then back. Non-fiction writers like Erik Larsen, Thomas Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote as well as David Halberstam did and do that.

So do Aristotle, the ancient writers, and other good writers throughout history. Boring writing is a relatively new thing, and so is boring preaching, and both are pervasive. Those people use the principles of *New Journalism* to write history that is a really good read, and so does God, when He writes the Bible, which is also a really good read.

Whether we're talking about the journeys of the OT Israelites, or the ministry of Jesus, or the work of the Apostles, the scene is almost always changing from one place to another, and then often back, in this true story that the Bible tells. So also do we meet a character, then go on to a different character, then back to the first. And He uses figures of speech.

Even the Second Person of the Trinity pops up from time to time in the OT, and He is clearly the main character of the entire Bible from start to finish. Since it's a long true story that plays out over an extended period of time, sometimes characters die, only to be replaced by other new characters, a lot like TWD. They in turn leave the scene in time.

On another literary level, like I said, I don't particularly like or agree with chopping the text up like they did this week, because – maybe God and John wrote it that way because it's supposed to be written that way. The meaning of words and sentences is largely determined by context, and when you cut out chunks, context is cut away as well.

As we read through this first chapter of John, we cannot help but notice the contrast between the language used to describe John B, and the language used to describe Jesus. They are in many ways very similar true characters, and they will be joined at the hip until the death of John. But Jesus is different from John in several important ways.

Jesus is clearly not only the pre-eminent character in the narrative, but He is by the words of the author placed into an entirely new and unique category from John. John is a guy, and he's a very noteworthy guy, and that was noted in his time, but we never get the idea that he was divine or anything like that. But we do get that distinct sense about Jesus.

Textual Notes

Verses 6-8

6. John the Apostle's introduction of John the Baptizer is pretty straightforward. He says of John simply that "Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος – there was a man," the generic word for what

we would call “mankind” or “human.” If I were going to paraphrase this phrase, I would say, “So there was this guy,” and then you talk about that and we get to know him.

John A then describes John B as “ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ Θεοῦ - having been sent from God.” The verb used to describe the sending is a perfect participle of ἀποστέλλω, a word that occurs with great frequency in the NT. It is the word from which we get the word “Apostle,” and it means one who is sent, making John to be an apostle-like person.

The verb is followed by a preposition followed by a noun in the genitive case, action out of. John is sent out by God, and he comes from God, but he is not the Son of God. There is a sense in which it could be said that every human being has his origins in God, since God is the one who grants conception, but in John’s case it meant more than just that.

Review the manner of his conception and birth, like you were supposed to last week, and we see that his birth took place under very unusual circumstances. The unusualness was very public, and that had to add to his street cred as a prophet sent from God, and it was probably the main reason why he and his message were so highly thought of by so many.

Doesn’t it seem like God is always sending somebody here and there, from Jesus to this John B to the Apostles, to missionaries and pastors, all of us sent hither and yon to do His work in His stead, until His return. You may recall that the perfect tense – of the verb “to send” – indicates past action with results that endure into the present and beyond.

The words that these men speak, the Word of God, has results that last to eternity. The OT Prophets and the NT Apostles wrote it down, and both testaments exist to this day, and through them people believe and become Christians. Those Christians all eventually died, and then they go to heaven – not hell – the results of the Word last for eternity.

I tell my hearers that if you want to get in on the action and talk to people about Jesus, then knock yourself out. If you don’t want to talk to people about Jesus, then invite them to church, where the Pastor will preach the Gospel. If you don’t want to invite people to church, then maybe pray for them. If you don’t want to pray for them, then you should.

If you recall, the Angel Gabriel specifically told Zacharia to name his son “John” (Luke 1:13), and then talks for a few verses about what kind of a man John will be, concluding with news that John will be like Elijah. The name John comes from the Hebrew “יְהוֹנָתָן” – God is gracious,” and indeed the message of John is of that God who saves by grace.

7. Having identified the man by name, John A says that John B came “εἰς μαρτυρίαν, ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός – as a witness, so that he could testify about the light,” which he has already mentioned (vv. 4-5), but we didn’t read it. The Light is Jesus, a metaphor that lends itself to some good and interesting preaching. Light is necessary for life.

If you word study that word translated “witness,” from which comes our word “martyr,” then you will see that it refers to one who has actually been there in the physical presence

of Jesus, and who has henceforth died for the Faith. John B is one such person. We generally think of Stephan as the first Christian martyr, but wasn't John the first?

We've talked about this before, and how the LCMS has co-opted that biblical word, changed it, and used it as a hammer to pound the defenseless laymen into submission, convincing him that if he isn't "witnessing" to each and every relative, friend, and co-worker, he's not a very good Christian. It's messed up our whole idea of evangelism.

What we ought to be doing is telling people to point people to the witness offered in Word and Sacrament (1 Jn 5:8). But you've heard that all before. Nine years ago, I gave up my thirty-year crusade to get the LCMS to stop doing what we're doing and to start doing what we ought to be doing with that word, and now we see it all over the place.

When the word "witness" begins to appear so prominently on synodical documents generated from on high, it's time to count your losses and move on. I have. It's the nature of language; words change, and we can resist, but at some point "gay" no longer means "happy," and "witness" in the LCMS does not mean what the Bible says it means.

One of my FB groups is for discussing the English Language II. The group was started by people who people on the English Language I thought were too strict. But even on the II group, people divide along lines of various degrees of "descriptionists" who favor speaking like we *actually do* and "prescriptionists," who advocate how we *should*.

Me, I will continue to teach the word "witness" in the correct way and explain how the LCMS has changed its meaning. It's not a moot point. If I see myself as a witness to and for Jesus, that's one thing, and it puts a great burden on me. If I see myself as one pointing to the things – Word and Sacrament – that bear witness to Jesus, that's different.

This appropriate use of that biblical term has Christians who aren't witnesses proclaiming The Word to people or bringing people to church, where the pastor pronounces absolution and preaches the Gospel and administers the Sacraments, the "three witnesses" that John talks about. In this way, through these witnesses, God makes more Christians.

Here, John is a "witness," who not only saw Jesus alive with his own two eyes, who not only heard Him with his own two ears, but who had known Him for quite some time, and John knew Him well. Because John knew Jesus well, it is with utter confidence that He can say the things that he said about Jesus. That, and by inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

We, who have what Peter calls the Word "more certain" (1 Peter) can be equally confident that when we talk about Jesus, we speak as people who have heard and seen Him in the current modes of witness of Word and Sacrament. As a practical matter, pointing people to those things is a lot more effective than the latest evangelism program.

That's the first purpose clause, and now another purpose clause about John, that he came "ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ – so that all might believe through him." John is the person at that place and time who is preaching the Gospel and administering Baptism. He is the man bringing the means of grace to the masses. Today, Pastors do that.

8. John B was very popular, and John A notes that John B is not the light, and then, with another purpose clause, emphatically notes "ἀλλ' ἵνα μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ φωτός – but he came in order to bear witness to the light," and a final purpose clause, "ἵνα πάντες πιστεύσωσιν δι' αὐτοῦ– so that all might believe through him," through his preaching.

Both Johns know full well that John the Baptizer is not "the light." Jesus is the light, and John's job is to point to the place where The Light may be found. When Jesus comes out into the wilderness, John points to Him, and tells the listeners who He is and why He is here. Later, he directs his disciples to follow Jesus, The Light, and some do believe it.

Now, since Jesus, having now ascended into heaven, is no longer with us, and we can no longer be a "witness" of his physical earthly presence, and we can't point to a place on the earth where Jesus can be found like in that day. But that doesn't mean He has entirely left the planet. One Lutheran has opined that now He's more present than ever.

The faithful pastor, emulating John the Baptizer, will point the hearer to the place where Jesus may be found; in Word and Sacrament. The hope of John is that by his preaching, by his baptizing, and especially by his bearing witness to "the light" who is Jesus, people might believe. The word for "believe" is a verb in the subjunctive mood, "πιστεύσωσιν."

The subjunctive is the mood of uncertainty, and there's hardly anything less certain and more uncertain than predicting the response of people to The Word of God. Sometimes they believe, and sometimes they do not believe, and sometimes they are interested, and sometimes they tell you to talk a long walk off a short plank. Nothing new there.

The Parable of the Sower and the Seed teaches that we can and should sow the seed of the Word, but the results will vary, often greatly. Paul noted, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." In these days of declining attendance, waiting for and praying that God would make Christians here – or not – is not good enough for some.

We see this playing out in the work of Jesus. He was received better in some times and places than in others. In John's gospel especially we note how many times the people were "divided" in what they thought about Jesus. They all saw the same things done by Him and heard the same words spoken by Him. Still, their response varied, often greatly.

That trend continues in the Book of Acts, where we see a likewise variable response to the preaching of the Apostles. Some believed, and some did not. Some determined to kill the messenger. When Christian missionaries went to the Europeans, they were well received and many believed, but not so much when they went to Asia. Different soil.

Since the Europeans continue in droves to abandon the faith of their fathers, God seems to be making a lot more Christians in southeast Asia and Africa than He used to. The Christian religion is growing numerically faster in China than anywhere else in the world. The upshot of this is that we find ourselves in a particularly awkward historical context.

In the current context, God does not seem to be making as many Christians as He used to here, and we are even compelled to look on in horror as even many of our own children, people who know better, stray away. Congregations everywhere dwindle in numbers, and we suddenly find that preaching the Word “in its truth and purity” is not enough,

Maybe we need to try _____. People know basic reproductive biology, and they know that the gray-hairs are past child-bearing age. The focus shifts to doing things to deliberately attract the young people, who have small children and may produce more. Changing what the Bible says is probably the most commonly used method in America.

We observe that doing that only makes it worse. The preferred approach in our church body to getting and retaining the young people is to get an inexperienced pastor and make sure he does children’s sermons. The approach that actually works is to refrain from changing what the Bible says and making Sunday morning a time of excellence.

I have over the last few years become increasingly aware of how unique we are in the LCMS. I used to complain that sporting events and the like were scheduled on Sunday morning because “nothing important is going on Sunday morning anyway.” I was being facetious, but now I’m not. Lots of people think that, and they identify as “Christian.”

A family with small children starts coming to church. Neither of them is Lutheran, but the Lutherans have Sunday School, Confirmation, and we are teaching them the same morality that they are teaching at home. Few churches do that these days, and especially when it comes to gay matters, the RC has a hard time practicing what it preaches.

If you look at the Christian Vocation as serving your neighbor, what does your neighbor need? What do your neighbors need for their children? If you’re going to do childcare, give it away, don’t sell it. Many students struggle, and it’s easy to get behind. Offer tutoring after school to meet that need, and don’t charge for that good work either, et al.

Verses 19-28

19. We now cut to John, who is in the wilderness – v. 28 tells us the location – and John A tells us about a time “ὅτε ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐξ Ἱεροσολύμων ἱερεῖς καὶ Λευεῖτας ἵνα ἐρωτήσωσιν αὐτόν – when the Jews from Jerusalem sent out priests and Levites so that they could ask him.” They wanted to know “Σὺ τίς εἶ – who are you?”

Google maps says that this would be for them a journey of about fifteen miles to the east, a few hours walk. The priests and Levites were just being responsible. At the very least,

given that people were listening to John, and that many of them were buying what he was selling, they needed to know more about him. Besides that, John was one of them.

It cannot be ruled out that some of them may have been genuinely concerned about protecting their flock from false teachers, who were legion. It's what faithful holy men of all times and all places should do. John does not reprimand them for coming out, and when they question him, he answers them, and he answers truthfully and respectfully.

Having introduced the concept of "witness," and then having talked about that concept on several occasions, the author mentions it again early in v. 19, clarifying exactly to what John bore witness. The noun used here, "μαρτυρία," and the verbal cognate "μαρτυρῶ" (20) were common words used to describe what we and they would call a "witness."

That witness would "give testimony," a concept very familiar to us. The word was almost always used in those days in the forensic sense, in a courtroom setting, much like we would use the word these days in those kinds of settings. In those days, it was one of the two or three places where using things like Logic and Rhetoric was imperative.

Matthew tells us that even certain of the upper echelon of Jewish theological minds, the Pharisees, were at least interested in his teaching. These men are also to be commended for going to John themselves and finding out for themselves who he was and what he was doing. They would have been trained theologians, and best able to sniff out heresy.

We note finally that it is "οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι – the Jews" who sent those men to that place. That is a familiar phrase in John's gospel. He uses it often, and as an idiom meaning those from his own religion who were opposed to Jesus. The opposition to Jesus came not from the common man, but it came overwhelming from the religious establishment.

The ask John, "Σὺ τίς εἶ - who are you?" Because the Greek language is a conjugated language, the pronoun "Σὺ - you" is not required. When you see it, the author has placed it there for emphasis. When the author puts the word first in the sentence, even more so. They don't care about anybody else but emphatically tell John they're talking about you.

20. They do not ask John if he is the Christ, but when asked who he is, John answers by telling them who he is *not*, which would indicate that at least some people thought that John was The Christ. They did. That is not surprising, and this was not the last time that this apparently widespread and common misunderstanding of his identity would come up.

That answer, John A tells us, took the form of John B "ὡμολόγησεν καὶ οὐκ ἡρνήσατο – he confessed and did not deny." Then he repeats it, "καὶ ὡμολόγησεν – he confessed," which I take to mean that at this point – having said that he's not the Christ – John says that Jesus is the Christ. Is not that the actual meaning of confessing, and not denying?

These are all aorist verbs, and they are the two words used in the NT to indicate that somebody "confesses" to believing in Jesus or to "deny" the same. In the Early Church,

when a Christian was turned in for the crime of being a Christian, he could either “confess” and face the consequences or “deny” and be set free (see 1 Corinthians 12:3.)

We can’t help but notice the phrase John used to deny and confess; “Εγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ὁ Χριστός – I am not the Christ.” It’s a phrase used often in John, except without the negator “οὐκ – not” and in reference to Jesus, who is the Christ. The phrase “Εγὼ εἰμὶ – I am” is the proper name of God, and John puts it into the mouth of Jesus several times.

21. So they ask John whom he is, and John tells them whom he isn’t, using not a name, but a title, saying “I am not the Christ.” So it is that we have a follow-up question; “Τί οὖν – then who?” That interrogative pronoun “τίς,” can mean “who” or “which” or even “why.” Some translations have “who,” and most have “what,” but “who” is correct.

To use the pronoun “what” is to make it more about what John is saying and doing, and to use “who” makes it more about his identity. The word “τίς” is the same pronoun used in their first question, where the inquiry is clearly one of identity, “Who are you?” and it seems preferable here to use “who,” since the question clearly is one of John’s identity.

Knowing their OT, and that Elijah’s return is a precursor to the coming of the Christ, they now specifically ask John if He is Elijah. He responds “Οὐκ εἰμὶ – I am not,” the verb of being, negated by the negator. He says that he is not Elijah, and yet Jesus says that John is “Elijah” and adds “who is to come” (Matthew 11:14), so which is it? It’s both/and.

It’s both, and you might want to address this, especially if you have people who like to read their Bibles. The question here is whether or not he is actually the actual Elijah. The statement made later on by Jesus (Mt. 11:14) that John is the one who has come before Him means he performs the function of Elijah, to be the precursor to the Christ.

So when it comes to the identity of John B, at least some people think that he is the Christ, some think that he is Elijah, and the third question, “Ο προφήτης εἶ σύ – Are you the prophet?” indicates that at least some people think that about John. We note here the presence of the definite article. The idea is not that John is *a* prophet, but *The Prophet*.

The question is whether or not John is the prophet spoken of by Moses in the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy (18: 16, 18), the one who would exceed Moses as prophet, one who speaks God’s Word with absolute perfection. To this question, John simply answers, “no.” That Prophet is, in fact, Jesus, the One to whom John will point, not John.

22. Now the priests and Levites reveal themselves to be only emissaries for those who have sent them. They have articulated their own ideas about him, and now, “Τίς εἶ - who are you?” and they ask “ἵνα ἀποκρισιν δώμεν τοῖς πέμψασιν ἡμᾶς· τί λέγεις περὶ σεαυτοῦ – so that we might give an answer to those who sent us,” i.e. The Pharisees (24).

They return to their original question, leaving off the pronoun “you” – which I told you is not needed – and they have already used it once, saying “Τίς εἶ – Who are (you)?,” and explain “ἵνα ἀποκρισιν δώμεν τοῖς πέμψασιν ἡμᾶς – so that we might give an answer to those who sent us.” And then “τί λέγεις περὶ σεαυτοῦ - what do you say about yourself?”

23. John is aware of both his identity and his role in things, and he quotes from Isaiah 40:3; that’s what John B says about himself. Using synecdoche and avoiding the term “Εγὼ εἰμι” he says that “Εγὼ φωνῇ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ – I am the voice crying in the wilderness.” The verb occurs twelve times in the NT and has connotations of intensity.

He will, in fact, be working in the wilderness, and we don’t ever see John located anywhere but there. Whether or not he was connected to the Essenes, his lifestyle is described as one who lived and worked outside of the city. His dress is not described here, but it is noted elsewhere – like last week – as that of one dwelling in the country.

24. John A now tells us that these priests and Levites were “ἀπεσταλμένοι ἦσαν ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων – sent from the Pharisees.” Matthew says that some Pharisees were among those who actually went out to visit with John. There is no contradiction, and it seems reasonable that some of the sending would go along with the sent or maybe go separately.

We note here that the last noun is in the genitive case, meaning that the priests and Levites who come to John B come from among the Pharisees. It would have not been at all unusual for a man who was a Levite to also have been a priest, nor would it have been uncommon for a Levite who was a priest to have also been a Pharisee or even a Scribe.

To say that these men are priests of the tribe of Levi and then to drop the bomb that they are also Pharisees would be like referencing LCMS Second Vice-President Reverend Doctor Captain John Wohlrabe. Well, which one is it? And Matthew (3:7) says that Sadducees – who were not Pharisees – were as well making the journey to see John.

These men are thus here revealed to be some heavy hitters, not just a few simple country parsons, and their identity elevates the stature of John B. The idea that these sorts of men would make a journey out of Jerusalem over to Bethany Beyond the Jordan to inquire about the identity and work of John speaks volumes of his perceived import to them

25. John A has just dropped the wild card that the men are Pharisees, and they are now revealed to be theologically astute, and their next question shows that they have been trained in Logic, the Science of Correct Thinking, as would have been any educated person of the day. Americans today have not been, and it’s a problem, and it shows.

This question shows us the real reason for their visit, as they ask the question that they really want answered, “Τί οὖν βαπτίζεις εἰ σὺ οὐκ εἶ ὁ Χριστὸς οὐδὲ Ἠλείας οὐδὲ ὁ προφήτης – why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet.” Was the purpose of their visit not fact- finding? Is it an attempt at “gotcha”?

John grew up in the parsonage, and he was maybe known to these men as “Zacharias’ boy.” John’s father had been a priest, and John would therefore have been of the priestly family, and so been able to perform baptisms. It would not have been out of the ordinary at all for John to be baptizing proselytes, a ceremonial cleansing of their paganism.

What would have been odd about the baptism administered by John was would have been that he was doing it to Jews, but apparently not to Gentiles. In fact, I don’t see where the Gentiles are coming out to be included in those being baptized by John, so his baptism would not have been considered to have been “proselyte” baptism, but something else.

Ellicott thinks the problem is just that,

Baptism, which was certainly one of the initiatory rites of proselytes in the second or third century A.D., was probably so before the work of the Baptist. It is not baptism, therefore, which is strange to the questioners, but the fact that he places Jews and even Pharisees ([Matthew 3:7](#)) in an analogous position to that of proselytes, and makes them to pass through a rite which marks them out as impure, and needing to be cleansed before they enter “the kingdom of heaven.” By what authority does he these things? They had interpreted such passages as [Ezekiel 36:25](#) ff. to mean that Baptism should be one of the marks of Messiah’s work. None less than the Christ, or Elias, or “the prophet” could enact a rite like this. John is assuming their power, and yet is not one of them.

But since the questioners are not asking about proselyte baptism, that’s really beside the point. They were asking about all of those OT prophecies (Isaiah 52:15, Ezekiel 36:25 Zechariah 13:1) that talk about baptisms in connection with the Holy Spirit and with the coming of the Christ, a coming that would be preceded by Elijah and by The Prophet.

They are therefore essentially asking John the same question in a different way. People do that, you know. By what authority does John do this new thing? The baptisms of John do not take place in a vacuum, and the meaning of John’s baptism cannot be understood outside of the words that John B speaks by way of explanation of it.

26. If we look at the words that he has been speaking and will speak, we see that John very much sees himself as a precursor to the Christ, and that the coming of the Christ is in fact very near. John’s response, probably not the one that they were looking for, is that “Εγὼ βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι – I baptize with water,” and there’s nothing new to see here.

Nothing new to see here but, “μέσος ὑμῶν στήκει ὃν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἴδατε – in the midst of you stands whom you do not know.” To talk about baptizing with water is redundant, and his talking about a person they *don’t* know is further evidence that they *did* know John B. The One they did not know is Jesus of Nazareth, as of then unknown to them.

When John says that Jesus is “standing in the midst of” them, you wonder just how close physically He was to them. The literal meaning of that phrase is the Jesus was standing

there in the middle of these men who are duking it out theologically with John B. Jesus is standing there – while John is conversing with the religious – like a fly on the wall.

To answer their question, to say he baptizes with water is as redundant this week as it was last week, and like last week the phrase emphasizes that washing is going on here and nothing more than washing – except the connection with faith and repentance. His words about the One coming after him mean that He – not I – is the one you’re looking for.

And the One you’re looking for is standing in the midst of you. Last week Mark told us that John spoke at this point of the Holy Spirit connected with the baptism of the One whose sandals he is unworthy to untie. Ezekiel (36: 25, 26) especially connects the baptism brought by Messiah with the Holy Spirit, and He’s the One you’re looking for.

Origin compares the baptism of John with the later Baptism of Jesus,

We must note that John’s baptism was inferior to Jesus’ baptism. Those, therefore, in Acts, who have been baptized into John’s Baptism, who have not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit, are baptized a second time by the apostle. For the washing of regeneration did not come at the hands of John, but at the hands of Jesus through His disciples. And the so-called bath of rebirth takes place with the renewal of the Spirit, which even now is borne above the water, since it is from God.

27. John then describes Jesus as “ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος – the one coming after me.” The construction ὀπίσω μου – this adverb followed by a noun in the genitive case – often means physical location behind, as several times in Matthew (4:19, 16:23,24, et al). The phrase occurs three times in this chapter of John, verse fifteen, here, and in verse thirty.

Revealing once again his understanding of his place in relation to Jesus, John B talks about his own unworthiness to do even what the lowliest of the domestic help does, untie the foot ware of a visitor upon the visitor’s entrance into the house. While others are elevating him, John himself is doing just the opposite. We would call it self-deprecating.

Pastors and people alike ought to take note of this; it’s always about Jesus, and the pastor who clearly points the people to Jesus where He is found – in Word and Sacrament – is doing what he’s supposed to be doing. The Pastor who makes it all about him, and the individual Christians – generally “spiritual” people – who do that are also doing wrongly.

John is self-deprecating, but more to the point, John is trying his level best to answer the question put to him by the theologians. He is baptizing, but it’s only water, and the one you know from the OT who will come doing a baptism connected to the Holy Spirit has not yet been revealed to you, but He’s here, and He’s probably in very close proximity.

28. They never give the cease and desist order to John. They never tell him to stop doing what he’s doing or saying what he’s saying. As noted earlier, we know from Matthew

(3:7) that “Pharisees and Sadducees” were coming for John’s baptism, an act that showed a very high regard for John and for his work and by implication for his message.

John was one of them, and it was his vocation to preach the Word, to teach, and to do proselyte Baptisms and all the things priests do. He was doing what he was supposed to do. His problems didn’t start until he became connected to Jesus, and even then, it wasn’t these men, but Herod in particular who probably never liked him in the first place.

Law/Gospel

Not Sent/Sent – Had John not been sent, people would not have believed in Jesus. John has been sent, and so have the Apostles and pastors, and through their handling of the Word and Sacraments, people believe.

Darkness/Light – This is actually a theme from the interlude readings that have been left out, but you can do a lot, preaching-wise, with this metaphor.

No Witness/Witness – God has not left us in ignorance. He has given Absolution, Baptism, and the Sacrament of the Altar to witness to us the presence of Jesus.

Sermon Titles

So There Was This Guy...

The Witnesses for Jesus

Darkness and Light

Who Are You?

Hymns

On Jordan’s Banks, the Baptist’s Cry – LSB 344

Sing Advent hymns during the Advent Season.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

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GBO – www.greekbible.com

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Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html

