

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus our Lord, Saviour, and coming King be yours. The title for today’s sermon is: “Something different” and is based on the Gospel reading, from the Gospel of St. John, chapter one. Let us pray... Amen.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”(*John 1:6-8*) John the disciple describes John the Baptizer very briefly in his Gospel.

Matthew and Luke give us a far more detailed account of John the Baptizer’s miraculous conception and birth. Elizabeth, his mother, was barren, and both she and Zacharias, her husband, were advanced in years. His advent was announced by the angel Gabriel. And when he was still in his mother’s womb, he was already filled with the Holy Spirit. When Mary came to Elizabeth and greeted her, the babe leaped with joy in her belly. And Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaimed aloud: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb!” In response Mary, also filled with the Spirit, joyfully sang the Magnificat. And later, after the birth of John, Zacharias sang the Benedictus. All this is recorded in the first chapter of Luke.

Yet the disciple John completely passes over all this in silence. With not so much as a word does he touch on the Baptizer’s conception, his birth, or his youth. He ignores the command God gave him in the desert and his wanderings in all the region around the Jordan. He also ignores where he begins something extraordinary: preaching in the desert, not in the temple, and baptizing in the Jordan all who come to him. The disciple John does not even speak about the Baptizer’s ‘gourmet menu’ of locusts and wild honey, his garment of camels hair, or the leather belt around his waist. All this is described at length in the third chapter of Luke. Yet, the disciple John bypasses all this. He immediately introduces him simply as John—as one sent by God as something different. Without further ado he points us to his office. Instead of referring to his birth, he presents his mission, saying: *There was a man sent from God.*

And the Baptizer’s office and mission—his vocation—from God is clear: **“He came as a witness (*μαρτυριαν*), to bear witness about the Light, that all may believe through him.”**(*John 1:7*) God sent John the Baptizer as a witness, the Greek word here for ‘witness’ is the root word for the English word ‘martyr’—one who would be persecuted, sometimes even to the death, for the faith.

John the Baptizer was sent to point to the long awaited Saviour; Light come into the world. He was to point to the arrived Saviour, not just the Light to come, but the Light—the Christ—who was already in the darkness of their presence, even though they did not yet

recognize Him. He was called to prepare the way of the Lord who was walking among them, the One who would die for all, and the One who would come again in final Judgment.

But the people didn't get it. Some might have, but the religious representatives didn't. Together they stood at the crossroad of all time, when the waiting for the Christ long promised would come: When God took on human flesh and blood, and entered into the fallen creation: In their presence was God in the flesh, came to redeem the world. He walked on the same streets. The One who breathed into existence all of creation, was also the One who would also be the Lamb; the sacrifice for the sins of a fallen creation. Even with the Baptizer's preaching, still the people didn't get it.

So the religious establishment of the day sent priests and Levites to talk to him to figure out what was going on. John was something different than what they expected, and so they went to talk to him. They asked him, “**Who are you?**” and he told them clearly, “**I am not the Christ.**” So they asked if he was Elijah and the Baptizer responded, “**I am not Elijah.**” While the prophecy about Elijah was fulfilled in John the Baptizer, he was not Elijah. So confused by his teachings and proclamations the priest and Levites asked, “**Are you the Prophet?**” really meaning are you the new Moses and giver of new laws. John simply answered “**No.**” The Pharisees and Levites then asked him, “**Who are you? ... What do you say about yourself?**” to which John the Baptizer points back to God and what God was doing through him: He said, “**I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.**” (*John 1:20-23*)

John announced a new exodus: A greater exodus. While God had delivered the children of Israel from their Egyptian captivity, God would soon deliver His people from sin's captivity through His Son, the Lamb of God. Through John's preaching of repentance and Baptism, God was preparing people spiritually. He was called to be something different because God was doing something different, promised from the beginning, something to save all people.

Christ came for you me and all people: His life, death, and resurrection put an end to the Law and its unachievable demands of perfection. In exchange, Christ gives Himself in and as the Gospel: Christ who has done it all for you.

John knew his place before God, he was a sinner in need of a Saviour. He wasn't almost good enough, instead he confesses how he wasn't even worthy enough to touch the filthiest part of the Saviour, of Christ Jesus—of God in the flesh because He was a sinner.

But God did something different: He sent His Son Christ Jesus into our world. Christ came to establish the new and greater exodus and in so doing also makes us into something different.

Christ’s life, death, and resurrection were for you as Scripture and the Creeds confess. He came to save you from the consequences of your sins, to deliver you from the power of sin and death, and to give you eternal life.

Through the water’s of Baptism God made you, and continues to make you into something different. You are no longer a child of Satan, condemned with this world for God has called you out of this world. No longer do you have to try to be good enough to earn your salvation as Christ has earned it for you, gives it freely to you, and carries you in that salvation. No longer are you only flesh and blood, for now Christ lives in you and you in Him, now in for eternity. We can say with the Apostle Paul: **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”**(*Galatians 2:20*)

In Baptism God took off your clothing of condemnation and put on His garments of salvation (Isaiah 61:10). God clothed you in His finest so others, when they see you, your actions, and your life, they would also see and hear Christ and His salvation for them.

God gives us the gifts and the Holy Spirit so we can be something different, so by our lives and lifestyle we can proclaim Christ. While we live in the flesh, we will still sin, but we can also openly repent of those sins, as we did at the beginning of the Divine Service, and return to the promise God gives us in our Baptism. Though we are broken vessels, God continues to fill us with His salvation until the day when He returns and restores us to how He intended us to be in the first place.

Until Christ’s return, and by the working of the Holy Spirit, we can **“Rejoice always,¹⁷ pray without ceasing,¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit.²⁰ Do not despise prophecies,²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good.²² Abstain from every form of evil.”**(*1 Thessalonians 5:16-22*) For by your actions, others will see and acknowledge you are different, and some may be lead to believe and be saved eternally because of you.

Like John the Baptizer, you are called to be something different because you are something different: you are a redeemed child of God who has died and been raised to new life in Christ. God has clothed you with the garments of salvation, with Christ Himself now in time and for eternity.

Together as part of the body of Christ here on earth we are called to point to Christ, who has come: who was born in a stable in Bethlehem, lived and carried our sins to the cross, died for us and all people, and who rose to proclaim the victory. We are also called to point to Christ

who is coming again: who will judge all people—the living and the dead—and who will bring all who believe—who have been given the gift of faith in Christ—into His presence in heaven for eternity, but for those who have rejected Him—those who do not believe—they will be eternally separated from Him and destined to an eternity in hell. We are also called to point and bring people to where Christ continues to be present among us: In His house, to receive His Word and His Sacrament—where Christ continues to teach and feed us for salvation and prepare us for His return.

Your salvation is already accomplished in Christ: by His work, His life, His death, and His resurrection in your place. But Jesus didn't just come and live, die, and rise for you, He came, lived, died, and rose for all people. This is the good news. Christ's gifts are freely given to you here in His house so you are equipped to live in the world, to share your Saviour and salvation with everyone around you, and so you can stand firm in the faith poured out into you.

Rejoice in your Saviour and the salvation He has given to you! Like John the Baptizer, you are something different. Take comfort in that for it is a good thing. Let your God-given difference point to Christ our Lord who has come, who is coming, and who will come again.

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) Amen.

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