



"Advent in June"

John the Baptist
Saturday & Sunday, June 23 - 24, 2018
All Services
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:57-80

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

When I was serving on the staff down at Camp Nawakwa thirty-blah-blah years ago, we would have weeks where there would be some particular emphasis and I always liked it when we got to July because one of the weeks that we would have as a theme was Christmas in July. It was always a lot of fun, we would decorate the cabins with lights and garlands, we would have a Christmas tree, we would sing Christmas carols and of course make all sorts of different kinds of crafts in the craft place and give them to each other so that we could celebrate the birth of Jesus in July. Of course, it was always somewhat ironic to me considering that most of the time it was 95 degrees, hazy, hot and humid, and that was usually different then what I experienced when it was Christmas and a lot of snow in December.

But it was a fun break and nice to be able to think once again about what the gift of Jesus meant to us. What the gift of the birth of Jesus when we waited with hopeful expectation for Jesus to be born, everything that that would mean to not only our own personal faith life, but also to the life of the world.

So, I was thinking, hey, how about if we celebrate Christmas in July, how about then Advent in June. I mean Advent is a great festival as well. I love the colors, I love the ritual connected to it, the candles and the Advent wreath and preparing our way to celebrate Christmas. The waiting and expectation, all of the themes that are a part of that, the pregnancy and new life and just knowing that Jesus is going to be coming and being born at Christmas. And of course, then there is the crazy character of John the Baptist.

Well, today is actually a festival day, it's the festival of John the Baptist. Now when the church creates its festival there are some dates that they know, and they have record of something happening on that date. For example, it might be the actual martyrdom date of one of the saints, and then we set that date as the date of commemoration. But in both the case of the birth of Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist we don't really know what the date is. Now of course we celebrate the birth of Jesus on the 25th of December. We do that in particular because it's a date that is close to the winter solstice. And the birth of John the Baptist is celebrated six months earlier on the 24th of June, which is very close to the longest day also known as the Summer solstice. So, if

you think about it John is born when the days are long, but they are beginning to get shorter. And Jesus is born when the days are short, but they're also dark, but they are beginning to get lighter and longer. And of course, this is a wonderful illustration of the idea of Jesus as the light of the world, bringing light into the darkness. And so, December 25th is a wonderful date for all of us to be able to celebrate the birth of Jesus. And it's also a liturgical calendar reminder you might say, remember what John the Baptist said about Jesus; Jesus must increase, and I must decrease. And we see in our liturgical worship calendar just those sorts of themes happening, Jesus' increase and John's decrease.

In the Bible God has spoken about a prophet coming who would go ahead and prepare the way for the Lord, prepare the way for the promised Messiah. These are things that certainly Zechariah and Elizabeth would have known about, they would have hoped for and prayed for. They would have believed and longed for this finally coming to pass and now they were all coming true.

In the Old Testament, God had made a covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and promised such a Savior to come to the people. And now in the fullness of time Elizabeth who is much older and has been unable to bear children is now going to experience the fulness of that promise. She had dreamed of motherhood, but it had only been for her a dream, but now finally she was able to experience it. All of those years she had lived in hope that perhaps she might become a mother and now finally it was being fulfilled by the promise of the angel. She had experienced God's mercy and had given birth to a son. She had finally realized that children were a blessing from God as now she became a mother. And John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, gave voice to that blessing that this elderly couple were now experiencing. Previously he had been unable to speak, punishment for doubting that this this could even happen, but now he gives this beautiful poetic poem that is often sung at morning prayer and it's called *The Benedictus* or *Benedictor*, which means *blessing*.

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel!
He has come to his people and set them free.
He has raised up for us a mighty Savior,
Born of the house of his servant David.
Through his holy prophets he promised he would
save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all who hate us.
He promised to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant.
This was the oath that he swore to our father Abraham
To set us free from the hands of our enemies
Free to worship him without fear,
Holy and righteous
all the days of our life.*

Holy and righteous all of the days of our life. Don't we yearn for that holiness, don't we pray for that righteousness, after all, don't we want things to be right? For the world to

experience justice, for peace, for people to live in harmony and healthy community? Righteousness, being right, doing right things, making things right.

But what happens if we don't agree on what is the right way? What if we have disagreements on what we should do or shouldn't do? What happens when we're not sure what the right path is, what do we do with people that we disagree with? Unfortunately, in this day and age I think we do way too much shouting them down. We drown them out or we turn debate into insult. Too often we marginalize our enemies or seek to destroy those who are opposed to us or our version of what is the right thing to do. And we see this lived out in the church and in our local communities, but also on the national stage and our national politics or world politics. Is that the way that God wants righteousness to be lived out in our lives, shouting at each other? Or perhaps there is another way, perhaps a way that Zechariah sang about so long ago, a way of mercy and hope, a way of harmony and respect. What God promises to do thru Zechariah's Benedictus is the promise of bringing salvation to God's people. And what has is talking about here is more than just political economic or social salvation, that tends to be the way we think about it. That somehow our politicians are going to be able to figure it all out or maybe if we just trust businesses more or if somehow society can get together and save us. But the great promises of the Bible go beyond these world of ideas of worldly salvation. The salvation that's proclaimed in the Bible opens us up to a world where sin and death, the brokenness that we experience in our relationships, the foundation of all of our problems that we experience are defeated once and forever in a new kingdom, in a new future where God reigns forever. Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, they are normal every day people like you and like me. They have real fears and real doubts, but also hope filled dreams of a better day when the future of promises of God lived out in his word are lived out in hope by God's people here and now. God intends to rescue us from ourselves, to offer a world where forgiveness rather than blame where life, Jesus' life defeats the darkness of our world, where God's mercy and peace is lived out in your life and my life every single day.

John the Baptist was born to prepare a way for the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John the Baptist was born to declare God's kingdom come as a present reality in your life and in my life. And you and I every single time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray for that as well. *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* May we live like it is Advent every single day of our life, waiting and hopeful, expectation, living in God's grace and mercy and sharing God's grace and mercy with those around us. Offering compassion and living in the hope and righteousness for all the days of our life. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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