

⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." ²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" ²⁴ Now some Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

"It's all about Jesus."

What's the point in Christmas? I think that if we aren't careful, we could easily miss the point in celebrating Christmas. At the worst, Christmas has become a self-centered, narcissistic event that focuses attention on ourselves. We can become like Clark Griswold in the movie, "Christmas Vacation." Our family would watch that movie every year and most of the kids had the lines memorized. In one scene, Clark spends the whole weekend putting up twenty-five thousand lights on his house, only to be totally disappointed when he flips the switch and none of the lights turned on. Why twenty-five thousand lights? He wanted to impress his family and his neighbors. But really, he wanted mostly to impress himself.

Children, when you get back together with your friends after Christmas, what do you talk about? You talk about all the gifts and toys you got for Christmas. In that conversation, everyone wants to impress everyone else. Chances are that you go home disappointed, because there is always someone who got more or better toys than you got. Disappointed in Christmas? Well, I suppose you could become disappointed in Christmas if it's just about family and food and presents.

Christmas isn't all about that stuff, is it? It's about Jesus. You can't get better than Jesus for Christmas. Jesus never fails to disappoint you. We learn that from our text this morning. John the Baptist understood that. As he preached his message to God's people, he made sure that it wasn't about himself, but all about Jesus.

I. John's witness

When you look at this story about John, it is obvious that John downplayed his importance so that he could focus people's attention on Jesus. John the Apostle, who wrote this gospel,

starts with these words. **“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”** John the Apostle uses John the Baptist in the way that a lawyer would bring a witness into the courtroom to make his case. This isn't the only witness he brings – just one of many. But John the Baptist was an important witness. How do we know that Jesus is the One who is the Savior of the world?

That's an important question in our pluralistic world today. Pluralism means that all religions are basically the same and that they all lead to heaven. This is not a new idea. It's been around for a long time. In fact, one of the reasons the Romans hated the Christians is that they believed in just one God and not many gods. The phrase that you often hear is that “all steeples point to heaven.” John the Apostle and John the Baptist would argue their case with you, if that is what you believed. They would tell you that Jesus is the TRUE light that gives light to EVERY MAN.

Let's pick that sentence apart a little bit. Jesus is the true light. Imagine that you are approaching the entry to a harbor with your ship at night. It's foggy and you need a clear signal light to guide you. You must get it just right or you could destroy your ship and all your passengers. On the shore, there are many lights from the city, but one of them shines more brightly and consistently than all the others. It's the lighthouse that marks the entry to the harbor, so you follow that light. In the same way, there may be many lights in the world which try to grab your attention, but only one light that will bring us safely home to heaven.

Second, John says that “through him all men might believe.” Jesus came to be the Savior for every person in the world. It doesn't matter what color your skin is or where you came from or what language you speak. Jesus came to be your Savior. This was an amazing statement coming from a Jewish prophet speaking to a Jewish audience in that day. Most of the Jews were looking for a Messiah for the Jewish people only. They didn't read Isaiah carefully enough, who called the Messiah a light for the Gentiles. Jesus came to be the Savior for all people.

Next, do you notice how John responded when the leaders came out to ask who he was? He firmly confessed that he was NOT the Christ. I think that was one of the reasons why John lived the lifestyle that he did. He lived in the wilderness. He preached in the wilderness. He wore clothes made of camel's hair, which was rough and cheap. It wasn't comfortable and it wasn't very attractive. It would have felt like wearing a burlap bag. He lived on bugs and honey. Why? I think he just didn't want to live on someone's payroll and be obligated to them. He was an independent voice that gave a true testimony to who Jesus is. He held Jesus up to be the Son of God and the Messiah.

Listen to what he said. He said that he was not a reincarnation of the prophet Elijah. He said that he was not the prophet that Moses promised in Deuteronomy 18:15. That is actually a prophecy about the Messiah. Instead John quoted Isaiah the prophet and said, **“I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.”** So if John the Baptist was sent by God to get his people ready for the LORD, and John pointed to Jesus, then who does that make Jesus? Jesus is the LORD. In that prophecy of Isaiah, the name used is God's special name in the Old Testament – Jehovah or Jahweh. By the way, do you know why we don't know how to pronounce this name? The Jews in the Old Testament so revered this name of God that

they refused to speak it out loud. Instead, they used the word LORD when that name is read. So John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "That's the L-O-R-D." That's your Savior God!"

I want you to think about his for a moment. The L-O-R-D that promised Abraham a son who would be the ancestor of the Christ is the same L-O-R-D who came to earth and was born of Mary. The L-O-R-D who spoke to Moses from the burning bush is the same L-O-R-D whom John the Baptist pointed out in the wilderness. The Word made flesh that was with God in the beginning (according to John 1:1) and through whom all things were created is the one that John baptized in the Jordan River.

What else does John tell us about Jesus? **"Now some Pharisees who had been sent²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know.²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."** The Pharisees were jealous that John was getting so much attention from the people. If John was the greatest prophet that ever lived, what did that make Jesus? Jesus had to be the Messiah. Jesus had to be God himself

John makes that even more clear a few verses after our text, when he says, **"This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'** We can understand how Jesus can come after John, because John was older than Jesus by six months. But how can John say, "He was before me?" John existed only after he was conceived and born. But Jesus existed before John was conceived because Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Jesus was the eternal L-O-R-D come in human flesh.

Why is this important? Because you need a Savior unlike any other savior. You don't need someone who will put toys under your tree. You don't need a national hero. You don't need someone to give you health insurance or tax breaks. You don't need someone to show you how to live your life the right way. Well, you probably do, but that's not the main reason your L-O-R-D came into this world. What you need was someone who could take away your sins. You need someone who could rescue you from the eternal sentence of hell. You need someone who could break Satan's hold on you.

And John showed us who that is. I can't help but steal the next verse in the gospel of John. You can't hardly listen to John tell us about the Messiah without hearing what John has to say in the next verse. **"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** This is what you need to hear. It's not about all the good works you can pile up in your life. It's not about how many prayers you pray. The Pharisees probably said more prayers than you will ever pray. It's not about whether you were born Jewish or born Lutheran or born anything else. It's about God making a sacrifice of his one and only Son that took away the sins of the world. It's all about Jesus.

This is what you want to hear about. If you are expecting Jesus in Christmas, Christmas will always live up to your expectations. And it's exactly what the world out there, the world of your friends and family and neighbors, needs to hear.

II. Our witness

John is called a “witness” in our text. He gave his testimony. These are legal terms that the Apostle John uses for John the Baptizer to describe his mission. When a witness gives testimony, the witness must stand before the public and tell what he or she has seen or heard. When Jesus sent out his disciples after he ascended into heaven, he said, **“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** (Acts 1:8).

Have you ever been called to testify as a witness in a court of law? I have, and it’s a little nerve-wracking. The lawyer for the defense wanted to get me to say something that would help his client. He tried to put words in my mouth and he tried to make me say things in a way that could be taken the wrong way. I had to think about every answer I gave carefully so that I would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Sometimes being a witness for Jesus can be the same way and we are intimidated into just keeping our mouth shut. That is becoming increasingly so in our culture where standing up for what you believe is not PC – politically correct. But if we don’t tell people about Jesus, who will? Jesus will not send his angels to bring the message. Jesus has chosen you and me to deliver the good news of his salvation to our world – to our friends and neighbors and families.

Here is something that may help you find courage to speak in those times. You don’t have to know everything that’s in the Bible. You don’t have to answer every question. Just remember that it’s all about Jesus, and tell people what you know about Jesus. Isn’t that what John the Baptizer does in our story? The enemies of Jesus tried to get him into a theological debate. Are you Elijah, or the prophet? And what right do you have to baptize? How did John answer their questions? He pointed them to Jesus. “I’m not one of those prophets you’re talking, I’m just a voice in the wilderness pointing out the Messiah. Whether I have the right to baptize or not is not important because there is someone coming who is far more important than me!” When in doubt, just tell people about Jesus!

And where will you get the opportunity? In a recent sermon President Mark Schroeder delivered to our church in San Antonio, Texas, he said: “We don't have to manufacture opportunities to share the gospel with people. God puts them in front of us every day. We just need the eyes to see them and the courage to seize them.”

That’s especially true this time of the year. You have neighbors. Share with them a devotional book when you take over your loaf of banana bread. You have conversations. How many times will God put you in a conversation with someone on a spiritual level? If they talk about the death of a friend, then tell them what peace it gives you knowing that Jesus rose from the dead. If someone says they are struggling with a problem in their lives, tell them that Jesus promises to listen to them and hear their prayers. And if they express interest in what you are saying, then follow up on them and keep the conversation going. Friends bring friends to Jesus!

Lastly, remember that it is the Word of God that changes people's hearts. The power is not in your ability to speak well. It is not in your winsome personality. It is not in your style or technique. John the Baptizer was a strange man preaching in the desert. His message was effective because it was God's message, God's Word. When you tell people about Jesus, the power to change someone's heart is in that message.

So remember these three letters in telling people about Jesus. W.O.W. Witness. Opportunity. Word. Just be a witness and tell people about Jesus. Look for opportunities that God puts in front of you. Trust God's Word to change people's hearts. This is a great time of the year to tell people about the Savior. Remember, it's all about Jesus! Amen.