

Greetings! We are now in the third Sunday of Advent and Christmas is in the horizon. Advent is a time when we prepare our hearts and minds for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This morning we will be looking at John the Baptist – a model for Christian ministers to prepare the way for the Lord's coming.

Before the coming of Jesus there were 400 silent years in which there was no major prophetic activity. John's birth was foretold by the angel to his parents Zechariah and Elizabeth who were of priestly descent. When it was Zechariah's turn to offer incense in the temple the Angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that he and Elizabeth would have a son and that they should name him John. Zechariah is not convinced and tells the angel that he and his wife were very old and wondered how this would come about. Zechariah is made dumb till the time the baby was to be born. This morning I want to look at three aspects of John's life which helps us to follow his example. Firstly, he was the one who prepared the way for the Lord. Secondly, he preached a message of repentance to the great and the small, and finally he lived a life of simplicity and humility.

John the Baptist appropriates the prophet Isaiah's proclamation about a voice calling, 'in the wilderness prepare a way for the Lord.' John sees himself as the voice in the wilderness preparing a way for the coming of Jesus Christ. John was prophesied by the prophet Malachi as the messenger who will prepare the way before the Lord's coming. John was the messenger or the voice calling in the wilderness. He knew fully well that he was to act like an ambassador who went ahead before the coming of a king. John likewise calls people to repentance and to be ready for the coming of Jesus. We too as God's people are called to prepare the way for the second coming of Jesus Christ. We too are to repent of our sins and share the good news about Jesus so that others too would receive him in their hearts before his second coming.

The second most important thing that we learn from John's life is that he preached a message of repentance to both the great and the small. John's message was one of repentance in the face of divine judgement. His object was not to get more people baptised, but to call the repentant and restored people of God from the imminent judgement. Baptism was a symbol of repentance and belonging to the true remnant of the people of God.

John was not afraid to speak against Herod Antipas the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea and the son of Herod the Great. He confronted Herod because he had taken Herodias to be his wife who was actually the wife of his brother Phillip. John had the guts to confront the king "you adulterer" because he had the moral courage and conviction. He himself led such a holy life that he was able to be fearless. Holiness and fearlessness go together.

John was calling his own people to go through the initiatory rite of Baptism indicating the beginning of a new commitment. This was usually done by Gentile proselytes but here he was asking the Jews themselves to go through the same rite. John was showing that a true follower of God had to make an individual commitment rather than trust in his family background. This is true in the Christian life as well. We all have to be born anew as individuals by asking for the forgiveness of sins and accepting the offer of eternal life which Jesus gives.

Finally, we see John's humility. His message was, "after me comes one who is mightier than I the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptised you with water but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit." John humbles himself and lifts the name of Jesus higher. He was a prophet who emptied himself of any unnecessary attention to himself. He is not worried about his name. We too are called to be humble like him and lift the name of Jesus higher.

John the Baptist's life challenges us to prepare the way for Jesus's second coming. It also challenges us to preach the message of repentance to the whole world. Finally, we are called to be humble and lead lives of simplicity that others would be drawn to Christ.