



# John the Baptist

Isaiah 40:1-11 Luke 1:57-80 Mark 1:1-8

December 6, 2020

Pastor Dave Bolte

One of the most interesting men in Scripture is *John the Baptist*.

*John the Baptist* is like a “hinge” in salvation history: **John the Baptist was the very last Old Testament prophet; and he was the very first New Testament witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.** John represents **all** the Old Testament faithful: the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Priests, the Kings, and all God's people in the Old Testament times: on behalf of *all of them*, John gets to *announce* that the long awaited Messiah is here! John, representing *all the Old Testament faithful*, gets to *see* Jesus with his own eyes, and on behalf of *them all*, he *proclaims*: **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”**

With John the Baptist, the Old Testament era ends; and the New Testament era begins! **He is like the hinge of History!** *John the Baptist* is one of the most interesting men in all of Scripture!

As the Forerunner of the Messiah, *John the Baptist* prepared people for Jesus by calling them to repent and to believe the Good News.

*And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. Mark 1:4-6*

This is how John got the nickname “*the Baptist*”. John “*the Baptist*” was the first one to introduce Holy Baptism, the new Sacrament, which forgives sins and unites people to the Promised Savior.

Since Holy Baptism was **brand new**, all believers needed to be baptized. For that reason, *John the Baptist* was mainly baptizing adults. He preached the Law of God and called people to repent; and then he baptized them for the forgiveness of sins.

**Baptism is the miracle that God works in your life to forgive your sins! God works through Baptism to actually unite you to Christ, cleanse your conscience, and bring you into God's Kingdom.**

John the Baptist's preaching focused on repentance and forgiveness: you turn from your sin, confess it to God, and trust that you are forgiven. In the Old Testament prophecies, repentance is pictured as a leveling of the ground:

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." Isaiah 40:3-5

Repentance is pictured as a "leveling" in our lives. We heard in Isaiah phrases like,

- ⇒ **Make straight in the desert a highway for our God**
- ⇒ **every valley will be lifted up**
- ⇒ **every mountain and hill will be made low**
- ⇒ **the uneven ground should become level** and
- ⇒ **the rough places made plain**

These words of "leveling" are all words of repentance.

**God's Word of Law** is what "**levels**" us. God's Law exposes your sin. You cannot stand in God's presence; your sin separates you from God; and you are **brought low** in contrition, guilt and shame. There is no good work that you can offer to God; there is no sincere desire that God will accept. God alone – through Christ His Son --- can "**level**" you and make you **right, straight, and true.**

Today we hear these Words as if Isaiah just spoke them for the first time! **God is speaking to you today in His Word!** --> He is speaking through Isaiah, and He is repeating it through John the Baptist! These words fresh, and living, and powerful!

- ⇒ They call you to turn away from any **rebellion** you have against God and His Word!
- ⇒ They call you to separate yourself from any **sexual immorality or worldly vice** that you are tangled up in!
- ⇒ God's Word calls you to stop drifting away!
- ⇒ Stop closing your ears!
- ⇒ Stop hardening your heart!

God, through Isaiah, and John the Baptist, is speaking directly to you today: and He is calling you to **repent!**

**God's Word is powerful;** it *levels* us and brings us to repentance. *But God's Word also heals you, forgives you, and makes you straight, right, and true in God's eyes.*

**That is what the Gospel does!** You hear the Good News about Jesus, the Savior. His work of death and resurrection makes you *straight, right, and true* in God's eyes. He speaks words of comfort and joy; He speaks tenderly to you and tells you that your sin is forgiven! In Jesus, the Messiah, you receive from the Lord's hand double for all your sins. God's grace is abundant; His mercy is generous; His forgiveness overwhelms us!

John's message was simple  
and to the point:  
Repent and be Baptized  
for the forgiveness of sins!  
(Mark 1:4)

**This is the true meaning of Christmas: that God sent His Son Jesus into the world to take your sins away. *That is what it is all about!***

The Savior was promised throughout the Old Testament and has now come into the world! He defeats the devil, rescues you from sin, and gives you eternal life.

**One way to think about Christmas is that it's all about Forgiveness<sup>1</sup>.** There is no sin that you have committed that God cannot forgive. There is nothing that you have done that puts you outside of God's grace and mercy. In Christ, God comes near you; He is with you. One of the names of the Savior is Immanuel, which means, *God with us: God with you.*

**Christmas is the story of God  
sending Jesus into the world  
to do the work needed to forgive your sins!**

---

<sup>1</sup> "Everything that the church does has to do with forgiving people their sins. Its pastors baptize in the name of the Triune God for the forgiveness of sins. The congregation gathers around the altar to receive the body and blood of Jesus that was 'given and shed for the remission of sins.' Scripture is studied because its words offer life and forgiveness. The Keys are used to impart the forgiveness of sins to the penitent. Even unrepentant sinners are excluded in the hope that they will repent and be restored. So all that Jesus taught and that the Church is to do in His Name centers on the forgiveness of sins in one way or another." From "For the Life of the World," October, 2002.

God's forgiveness for you is abundant, and generous, and never ending. God's Word of Law levels you through repentance; but in Christ, you are *straight, right and true* --> *you are forgiven!*

John the Baptist's words echo through the Church today as if he just spoke them; they are fresh and new – they call you to repent and to believe! *God sent His son for you!*

**Finally, one other thing.** Do you realize that you are like John the Baptist as you live your life as a disciple. Not only do you hear John the Baptist's words today, but you echo his words throughout your life.

You are now a 'voice in the desert' helping others prepare to meet Jesus. You can help people understand repentance and tell them about Jesus, the Savior God sent for them to take away their sins. Here is how Martin Luther put it:

"Creation is past and redemption is accomplished, but the Holy Spirit carries on His work unceasingly until the Last Day. For this purpose He has appointed a **community** on earth, through which He speaks and does all His work. *For He has not yet gathered together all His Christian people, nor has He completed the granting of forgiveness.*"

Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, Third Article.

There are people in your life that may never set foot in this church; *or any church for that matter* -- but yet, they will listen to you.

You are like *John the Baptist* to the people in your life. Your words about forgiveness in Jesus Christ can mean eternal life for someone else!

**Never underestimate the power of your witness for Christ!**

Like *John the Baptist*, you simply point people to the Christmas Savior and His forgiveness. We pray that the unchurched people in our lives can also have hope, forgiveness and eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ!

We are moving quickly through Advent --- As you prepare for Christmas, hear the words of *John the Baptist* and repent of your sins! And by the power of the Holy Spirit, believe that Jesus is the Savior God sent for you ... *and He forgives your sins!*

AMEN!