



Advent Sunday 3

THE NEW SHOFAR

Advent 3 - "Doing" what we believe

John 1:6-8,19-28 - bearing witness to Christ the Light

December 17th, 2017

Christians are to be Light bearers for the world

Having illustrated the exalted origins of the *Word/Logos* the Evangelist moves on to compare his beginnings with the origins of someone revered as one of the greatest of holy men of that era – John the Baptist. This John was not of divine origin. He was a *man sent by God*. He had been called to a unique mission within the religious history of Israel, indeed within world history. His role was to *bear witness*. His fundamental mission was *to bear witness to the light*. Even that has an extra element: *that all might believe through* this One, Jesus Christ who was the Word and Light.

Faith is always a verbal action

The Baptist is important only inasmuch as he reflects and highlights the True Light. It is here in these verses we find the first appearance of the most important verb in this Gospel: *believe* (note: this verb, along with its synonym *faith* never appear as noun in this Gospel. are always verbal, always about “*doing faith*”). There is a strong sense of *trust* in the way John uses the verb *believe* and it is understood to be a verb seeking a response: *receive* and then *act* on what has been taken into the person’s life. Later in his Gospel, John will clarify this a little more when he says *this is the work of God: that you believe in the One whom God sent* (6:28).

Notice too how all of this is the *work of God*, something God is doing within us once we have dared to believe. It is in this context we can understand how John is the *lamp* and not the *Light* itself. By bringing in this human witness to the Gospel here in his Gospel’s Prologue, he is including all Christians in John’s ministry. As he was called by God to *bear witness* so too do all *believing people* are called by God in baptism to be God’s lamps in the world of their own time.

Why did so many people hear John’s cry and go out into the wilderness to listen to him?
What need was he addressing?
What can this teach us about our own (and our parish’s) missions in the world?

Advent calls us to prayerfully assess the ways in which we are revealing the blessings of the Kingdom to others, by the way we live among them – according to Gospel mandates. How have we (and our parish) measured up? How have we made Christ known to those around us? What are some of the things Christ calls us to be doing and the ways of life he wants us to be following that make the Kingdom of God known to others? Where do they fit into our spiritual and pastoral priorities? How do we grow here?

John is offering us a number of significant teachings in these few verses. The first thing is a reminder we are creatures and not the Created One. Here we see how it is God who is very

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much in

control of all that is happening. Not only did he send the Light into the world, he also arranged for the Baptist to be there giving witness to that divine Light. It is God who cultivates and grows *believing* among us. God pursues us like the Hound of Heaven. God wants us to be with him and in him and it was for this reason *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. This is what John calls *the work of God*. This is all about what God is doing in us and for us.

How reassuring is that! Before we even contemplate a life of discipleship, God is already at work all around us, in countless ways, revealing himself to us and offering us a share in his own divine life. Our part in this call to ministry grows out of a willingness to trust and to intentionally model ourselves on Jesus who is our Light.

Jesus is God's Light in darkness – We are Light-bearers

A second important teaching here is this universal call to become *light bearers*. In a world struggling in darkness, we are called upon to be the people bringing God's light to bear. If people live in darkness, we are the ones sent forth by God to shine divine light into those dark places that others may be free. Then, when they are free, they are to themselves become *bearers of the light* for others. If there is darkness in our lives or in the life experiences of others, then it is there we are to be men and women who are busy *believing*. There is an imperative here. Each day the media makes us more and more aware of the power of contemporary forms of "darkness", God is doing something about all of that pain and suffering: he is sending us!

In this section John the Baptist models the activities of a *witness*. He is a kind of role model for all followers of Christ. If John is to be praised and exalted, it should not be at the expense of the ministry of Jesus, for John is *less than the Christ* in all things. We are told here what John is not, and are reminded of his function as a witness to another, to *the Christ*.

Jesus was not sent to support the status quo of Judaism

The Pharisees who sent envoys off to speak with John would have been motivated by a range of concerns. They would not have wanted to arouse Roman sensibilities with rumours of a coming Messiah. There were many such false "messiahs" around at the time and most of them brought nothing by problems and political disruption and risked bringing down the wrath of the intolerant Roman rulers. The Sanhedrin would also have been keen to make sure John was not a *seducer*, someone preaching an alternative message rather than one that favoured and supported their own positions. This makes it clear the mood of the time was one anticipating the imminent arrival of the Messiah. They represent the many "reasonable" excuses put forward for not opening ourselves up to the demanding will of God. There is always something limiting our ability to give 100% of ourselves and we find it easier to cherry pick those aspects of the Gospel which sit more easily into our way of life. This is the true witness of John. Some things are so important to the entire human race, to the whole of creation, they are worth dying for. This is Advent's call and the purpose for the season. It is all about

Explore what it means, in practical terms, to be light-bearers to the world. How do we "shine" Christ into the lives of those who are struggling with darkness? What is the place of "repentance" in the life of those seeking to be disciples and how do we go about it? How do we go about ensuring the light we bear is the light that is Christ and that it is the Christ of the Gospels and not the Christ of our own shaping?

preparing to become *faithful light-bearers*.

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