

Title: Advent 2

Yesterday was the Covina Christmas Parade. Immanuel First had a “float” in the parade. This year we had a bunch of people ride the float, 14 people? This is all part of our outreach ministry. Immanuel First is one of the few float entries which advertised to the community the true meaning of Christmas, which is Jesus Christ.

We have started the Advent season. During Advent we celebrate the coming of Jesus, both his first coming to Earth as a baby in Bethlehem, and his second coming, in Glory, on Judgment Day. Today’s gospel speaks about his first coming. Today’s gospel speaks about the herald of the Christ, John the Baptist, the one who would “make straight the ways of the Lord.” Jesus said of John, “Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than **John the Baptist**” John was a colorful character. His birth was foretold by an angel. He was the cousin of Jesus. He wore camelhair Now they didn’t have dry cleaners back then, so I’m guessing it still smelled of camel as well as smelled of John, himself. John’s diet consisted of wild honey and locusts. John was a colorful character indeed. One of whom people took notice. He spent a lot of time screaming at people. Repent! Repent! For the kingdom of God is here! To say the least He was probably one of the most interesting things for tourists to see around Jerusalem. But any story of John is incomplete without Jesus. In fact, John says that his sole purpose in life was to point to Jesus So, what was John’s story? Well, it starts in the Judean desert. John is out in the wilderness baptizing people. There is a symbolism to the desert wilderness. Scripture almost always uses the wilderness as a symbol for purging...a place to break from the sinfulness of the world. to escape from the corruption of mankind. John’s ministry in the Judean desert was posed against the teachings of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who lived in Jerusalem. According to them righteousness before God, could be accomplished by following the law. Jerusalem was the city of salvation. If you wanted to be saved, you had to come and worship in Jerusalem. By living in the wilderness John symbolically took a stand against them took a stand everything they represented. According to John Jerusalem was not the city of salvation, but the place where they killed the prophets of God. Obedience to the law was not enough. They lacked a relationship. They lacked a relationship with God. John’s mission was to tell the people of the coming Messiah. He had a simple sermon. Judgment day was nearly at hand, and it was being brought about by the appearance of the Christ. And with Him would come power. In the desert, John offered water baptism for repentance. But Jesus would offer a baptism of fire, in which the Holy Spirit filled the hearts of believers. Jesus was the messiah.

John would give no power. John could only point to power, John could bring in no kingdom. John could only prepare people for the kingdom of God. John thundered and railed against the people’s sin and told them of the coming Judgment. John commanded repentance. But that was as far as he could go. For

all his thundering and railing he could only call people to feel bad about their sins. Though he could call them to repentance, he could not save them. So, he had to point them to another. He could only point to the messiah. He had to point them to Jesus. John came to bear witness to the Light. And Jesus was that Light. John reminded the people of God's promise and pointed to Jesus as the fulfillment of that promise.

Though Jesus agreed with John's call to repentance, he went farther still. Jesus talked about a new kingdom. He spoke of a party for the weary and worn; the overwhelmed and the overrun. This party would be for all those who had faith in Jesus and stepped out of the worldly way of life. At this party, they would find rest and restoration; healing and hope. They would find salvation. John set the stage by telling people where they were. Jesus told people where they could be. Jesus spoke of a new world, where there would be no tears, no sorrow, where all the suffering endured on Earth would be made right again. Jesus spoke of a new heaven where there would be no death. where Man would be face to face with God. John could not bring in the kingdom. He could only point to the king of the kingdom. He could only point to Christ.

This was this very thing which totally distinguished the ministry of John the Baptist, from the ministry of Christ. Because Jesus was, and is "God," he was able to accomplish things that no human could ever do. In fact, Jesus was sent to Earth for the sole purpose of bringing us back into fellowship with the Father, to do that which we could not do for ourselves, to do that which we could not do without Him. When we needed a Savior, when we were stuck in our sins, doomed to eternity in Hell, God sent Jesus to save us.

God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believed in him would not perish but have eternal life.

When we were caught in our sinful state, deserving of death, God sent his son Jesus to pay the wages of sin owed by us, to die in our place, winning salvation for us. John the Baptist, John the man, could not be a savior. John the man could only point to one greater than he. John the Baptist pointed to God the son, to Jesus. And for those who receive him, they receive eternal life in heaven.

In fact, it is more than that. Because of Jesus, not only do they become citizens of the new kingdom, but they receive the status of children of God. They receive the status of family. They have been promised that whatever they ask for, in Jesus name, they would receive, not because God is a divine credit card. rather because, as children of God, they could be confident that God would provide for them. In the Lord's prayer it begins with the words Our father who art in heaven... In the original language it begins with the Aramaic word "Abba" Now the New

Testament primarily written in Greek, but it kept the Aramaic word “Abba” in the Lord’s prayer. There is something significant about the usage of Abba. Abba was the word used by a children to speak of a father with whom they had a close bond, a father whose love was never questioned a father with which the child had a loving relationship. It was like the word “daddy” This is precisely why the word was retained by the early Christians. They were drawn to use it for one reason, because they had that same kind of relationship with God as Jesus had with the Father; a loving and personal relationship. John the Baptist, John the man, could only point out our lack of a relationship with God. Only Jesus could offer a restoration of that relationship.

And that restored relationship has eternal consequences. There will come a day when God will gather both the living and the dead, to stand trial for all that we have done, or left undone. That day will be Judgment Day, On that day we will face all the sinfulness of our ways and the judgment we deserve. For those who put their faith in Christ we will not see just a judge. Rather we will be able to cry out to a loving father, Abba Father, forgive us. Forgive us for Jesus sake. And God the father will smile upon us. Christ, the judge, will smile upon us. And we will hear the judgment – your sins are forgiven... you are free.

However this will not be true for everyone. On Judgment day, there will be those who can cry out Abba father and there will be those who will not. Many will not because they think that the bible’s message ends with John the Baptist an accusation of sinfulness and a command to repent but no solution for eternity. They are ignorant of the Gospel, the good news. God calls us to share the good news of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for us they might come to know Christ. Like John the Baptist, our job is to point to Christ. Brothers and sisters in Christ. Go out there and point to Christ. Amen