

Advent 2 / December 8, 2024

Luke 3:16

*"I baptize you with water, but He who is mightier than I is coming."*

He who is mightier than I, is coming.

Luke gives the most comprehensive account of Jesus and John the Baptist's births, purpose and the connection between their ministries. The Angel Gabriel announced their coming into the world. He came first to John's father, Zechariah and then to Jesus' mother, Mary. Gabriel tells Zechariah that John will *"turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."* John would prepare the people for Jesus. The angel Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus *"will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord will give to Him the throne of His father David and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end."* John prepared people for Jesus, the Messiah, the heir of the kingdom God promised David. John prepares us to receive Jesus in repentance for the forgiveness of our sin.

When John was named his father Zechariah, prophesied about him, his ministry and the Saviour he would proclaim, He said, *"You child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins."* John prepared the people by showing them their sins, so that in repentance they would see Jesus as the Messiah and receive Him as their saviour. John was a prophet of the law which reveals sin. John shows us our sins, so that we see our need for forgiveness and see that in Jesus, forgiveness and life is offered for all to receive and given to all who believe.

John said, *"He who is mightier than I, is coming."* Jesus is mightier than John as the sun is mightier than the moon. The moon reflects the sun's light. John reflects the light of the eternal Son of God. Jesus is mightier than John even as the forgiveness of sin is greater than the awareness of sin that comes through a guilty conscience. We need to see our sins, so we see our need for the Saviour. Most importantly we need to see Jesus as our Saviour and believe there is forgiveness for all who believe in Him. God calls us to repentance through the law. He gives forgiveness and life through Jesus Christ. John continues to prepare the way for

Jesus. He opens our eyes to see our sins, so that the Holy Spirit may open our hearts to receive Jesus and believe in Him as our God and Saviour.

John began his ministry a little earlier than Jesus began His ministry. According to Luke, Jesus was about thirty years old when He was baptized by John and appeared in public. John was six months older than Jesus by human birth. John was the last prophet of the Old Testament. He embodied them in his dress, diet, location of preaching and the words he spoke. John was similar to the prophet Jeremiah, who also was set apart for service to the Lord before birth. The Lord said to Jeremiah, *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”* John was filled with the Holy Spirit before birth. He leaped in his mother’s womb when Mary, pregnant with Jesus, came into his mother’s presence. Even before his birth John prepared the way for Jesus.

John lived and conducted his ministry in the wilderness. Many prophets lived in the wilderness. It was a place of silence to hear the word of the Lord. In the wilderness we learn that we do not live by bread alone, but by the words that come from the mouth of the Lord our God. After His baptism the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, where He fasted forty days and overcame the temptation of the devil with the power of God’s word. The word of the Lord came to John in the wilderness. He began his public ministry, making people ready for the coming of the Lord by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John had a powerful presence and made a powerful impression on the people. People from all walks of life came to him for baptism, even Roman soldiers.

That’s somewhat surprising. John spoke a hard message that most people wouldn’t like to hear, or so you would think. He referred to the people who came to him as the offspring of vipers. That’s a rather pointed way of expressing the scriptural teaching of original sin. He warned them against receiving his baptism as a show piety. He called them to produce the fruit of repentance, lest like dead trees they be chopped down and thrown into the fire. He was so fiery in his speech that people thought he might be the promised Christ, the long-awaited Saviour. But John said, ‘No,’ *“One mightier than I is coming. I baptize you with water...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”* John prepared the house of Israel for Jesus coming with a baptism of water for the forgiveness of sin. John prepares us through repentance, so we may receive Jesus and His baptism. He baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John baptized with water as a sign of repentance, the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. John was a preacher of the law. He revealed sin. The law shows us our sins. Jesus forgives our sins. Jesus forgives sin and cleanses the hearts of those who believe and receive baptism in His name. John baptized as a sign of the intention to live a better life in relationship with God and with others. Jesus baptizes with fire. His righteousness consumes our sin through the sacrifice of the cross. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowers us to walk in the newness of life. The difference between John's and Jesus' baptism is akin to the difference between the sun and the moon. The moon reflects light. The sun gives light. Jesus gives light, life and salvation to all who believe and receive baptism in His name.

In the letter to the Romans St. Paul wrote about the importance of baptism as the foundation of our lives in Christ. He asked, *"Don't you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."* Jesus' baptism is mightier than John's baptism, because in it we receive the forgiveness He earned on the cross and the Holy Spirit to empower us to walk in newness of life. Jesus' baptism empowers us to fulfill the good intention of John's baptism to produce the good fruit of repentance in our lives with God and each other. Jesus is mightier than John. He baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and with fire!

John prepared people for a mightier prophet to come. His baptism prepared for a greater baptism, baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Everyone who received John's baptism later received baptism in Jesus' name, when they received Him and believed in Him as their God and Saviour. John baptized with water to prepare for Jesus' coming. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The fire of Jesus' baptism is the forgiveness of His cross, by which He atoned for the sin of the world. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, because in His baptism we receive the forgiveness of sin, a share in His resurrection to eternal life and the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and among us.

Jesus is greater than John in terms of the nature of His being and the salvation He brings. He is the Son of God begotten from eternity. He is the Saviour the prophets said was coming into the world. John and the prophets lead us to Jesus. John and the prophets proclaimed God's forgiveness. Jesus is God's forgiveness in human flesh; crucified for our forgiveness, raised for our justification. John called people to amend their sinful ways in the promise of forgiveness. Jesus gives

forgiveness and the power to walk in newness of life to all who believe. One mightier than John, Moses and all the prophets is with us, Jesus our God and Saviour. He is with us in the word, the washing of baptism, the bread and wine of Holy Communion. He is within us and among us through His Spirit, who fires our faith and empowers us to faithfulness. Come let us worship and adore Him. In Jesus' Name. Amen.