

Lesson 3

Third Sunday in Advent

The Holy Gospel: John 1:6–8; 19–28

John began his Gospel with words reminiscent of Genesis 1. He wrote of the Word who was with God and who was God and who made all things as having life in Himself, and that life being the light of men. He continued this metaphor as he told of John the Baptist, saying that John was not the ____, but came only as a ____.

35. In God's saving plan for His world, what occasioned the coming of John the Baptist at just that time?

John the evangelist's description of John the Way-Preparer agreed with the Way-Preparer's testimony about himself. John the Baptist had considerable impact on Jewish society. Josephus estimated that 300,000 people came out into the desert to be baptized by him. The whole Jewish society was buzzing with conversation about John—wondering whether this prophetic figure, with his uncompromising call for a repentance validated by a change in attitudes and actions, was the promised Christ. Opinions on both sides of the question must have flowed freely, even among the members of the Sanhedrin. Finally, that body, referred to as “the Jews” in John's Gospel, was constrained to send official representatives, priests, and Levite guards to observe and to investigate and to interrogate John. John was true to his calling. In response to their pointed question, he stated clearly: ____.

Since Elijah had gone bodily into heaven in a fiery chariot, there was expectation that he would return prior to the coming of the Messiah (see Malachi 4:5–6). “The prophet” also had messianic overtones (see Deuteronomy 18:18).

36. Jesus later identified John as “Elijah” (see Matthew 17:10–13). Why, then, did John tell his interrogators “I am not [Elijah]”?

37. John's questioners asked, “Who are you?” How did John identify himself? What does his answer reveal about John?

As Mark's Gospel tells us, John called people to “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (1:4). Though Old Testament ceremonial law had a number of cleansings with water, John's general call to the Jewish people to a Baptism of repentance for forgiveness was something new. It is understandable that his interrogators would press him about his authority to call for this new kind of

Baptism if he was not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. The Jewish people were familiar with baptism, especially as a ritual act of cleansing for Jewish proselytes. But they were unfamiliar with a need for Jews to be baptized.

In recording John's answer, the evangelist quoted only his "I baptize with water" (1:26). The other Gospels let us know that he completed the contrast by saying of the One whose way he was preparing, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Look a little beyond this pericope into its context and you see that the evangelist was keying in on the specific identification of Jesus by John. Read verses 29–34, remembering that John the evangelist had been a disciple of John the Baptist before becoming a disciple of Jesus. He had heard the Baptist's testimony himself. John the Baptist identified Jesus not only as the one "who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" but also as the ___ of God and the ___ of God.

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

Chapters 56–66 deal with the restoration following the exile in Babylonia. This section of Isaiah is Isaiah's prophetic and poetic vision of what will be for Judah in God's plan, colored by anticipation of the messianic kingdom.

38. What was to be the essential ministry of the One on whom the Spirit of the Lord came? What was assured by "the LORD has anointed me"? Which phrases in verses 1 and 3 show the impact this ministry of Good News will have?

39. How can "the year of the LORD's favor" and "the day of vengeance of our God" stand side by side?

40. What is the point of calling the citizens of Zion "oaks of righteousness"? What was God's purpose in planting them?

41. To what important event did "They shall build up the ancient ruins" and the following phrases point? "I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them"; "their offspring shall be known among the nations"; and "all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed."

It is still true of the Jewish people today, living in virtually all parts of the world, that they are blessed with intellect and abilities that make many of them leaders in almost every area of life. The prophecies find their true fulfillment, however, in the children of Abraham who put their faith in Abraham's Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 10–11 follow as an eschatological hymn that praises the Lord from the viewpoint of the fulfillment of His promises.