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Advent III
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Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
John 1:6-8, 19-28

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

John the Baptizer is everything we don't want to be.
But he fascinates us beyond belief!

John makes you uncomfortable.
But you can't help but to go and see what he's all about.

You can't box John in—no categories seem to fit.
He's not right wing or left, conservative or liberal,
he comes with no political party allegiance—
he's just out there!

“Who are you, John?” they ask.

“I'm not the Christ.”

“What then, are you Elijah?”

“I'm not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

“No.”

“Then who in the world are you? And what are you doing baptizing?”

The Pharisees have it all wrong, they've got the wrong guy.

John refuses to talk about himself, He refuses honor and glory and wealth and fame.
He refuses to be the subject of the verbs, the point of conversation—
John won't talk about himself!

John pays so little attention to himself,
he sometimes forgets to pull the locust legs out from between his teeth!
He doesn't care to comb his hair or smell nice.
He doesn't care if he's lonely or sick or radical or accepted by others.
John's only care in the whole world is that his voice cry out in the wilderness,
preparing the way of the Lord.
His only concern is that his bony finger point to the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world!

John is so unconcerned with himself, that when they ask who he is,
he can only say who he's not—“I am not the Christ.”

And in that John is nothing like us.

We love to talk about ourselves.
We love for others to talk about us—good things, of course!
We love to be the center of attention, we love to blush with pride, we love ourselves to death.

But not John.

John is the forerunner—the one who comes first, who is lesser, who is not the Christ!
John prepares the way, with voice and finger.

John is a witness, a testifier, a confessor.

John's the *advent-man*!

The preacher of the coming savior, the coming Light.

John comes first, but he tries as hard as he can to get out of the way!

Sure, he's a bit crazy, eccentric—*don't tell your mom your hanging out with John again...*

He's what psychologists might call a "monomaniac"—

a maniac over one thing, an excessive interest, an irrational preoccupation.

John is stuck on the Christ.

And so he *confesses*—he doesn't deny—but he *confesses*

that he's not the one you should be looking for;

he's not the Christ, he's not the Messiah, he's not the Light, he's not God.

And his message to us today, is that neither are we.

So get off John already, and get off yourself, and look to Christ.

Look to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John calls people out to the wilderness, to the desert,

away from the city lights, away from the distractions,

and into the darkness.

He calls us into the wilderness where we're no longer protected by the safety of our homes,

by the safety of our comfort zones,

by the safety of the way we've always done it.

He calls us out to the wilderness, where we can be *hurt*.

Where we finally slow down enough to see the darkness of our life.

Where we can see the pain we've caused:

the lies we've spoken, the hate we've felt—

where we can feel our own sorrow, our own darkness, our own pain.

He calls us into the wilderness so we feel its barrenness and fear its darkness,

and recognize our sin.

John prepares us to receive Jesus by showing how deep and dark into sin we actually are.

Sometimes our lives move so quickly we don't even notice.

Our days are so filled, so busy that we don't think twice about our neighbor or about our God—

we're stuck on ourselves.

We're stuck on what makes us happy, what makes us proud, what makes us important.

And that's why John must lead us out into the wilderness, into the barren desert;
that's why he leads us into the darkness—so we can finally see how fallen we are.

But it's precisely in this darkness, this fear of our inability to make it on our own,
that when John yells his "*Behold!*",
we know to lift our head, to lift our eyes and to see the light!

We're to follow his bony, outstretched finger and see the Christ,
the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And looking at Christ, looking at this Lamb alone, we're to see a way out of our darkness—
a way out of the barren wilderness,
a way out of ourselves.

Looking to Christ, and Christ alone,
we're to see hope for salvation, because we're finally looking outside of us!

And that's what John is for—
he's no use to this world, not good for anything,
except to bring us to Christ!

He's a witness, a testifier, a confessor that Light has come into the world!

And with this light there is also life and joy and a way out!

And what goes for John goes for your pastor as well—
a pastor isn't good for anything,
except to be the voice, the finger that leads you to this Light, this Christ, this Jesus!

Looking to this Christ, you'll finally get your eyes off your pastor, and off yourselves—
and when eyes are on Christ, they're on your salvation, your hope, your peace, your joy!

Again, Jesus said:
"Of those born of women, none is greater than John" (Lk 7:28).

Perhaps what makes John so great is that he's so nothing.

"Who are you, John?"
"I'm not the Christ."

But Jesus is.
Jesus is the light.
Jesus is the life.
Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!
And that means your sin, too.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit