

The Lord Has Clothed Me with the Garments of Salvation and Righteousness

SUNDAY 17 DECEMBER 2023 / GOSPEL READING: John 1:6-8, 19-28

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. 19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22 They said to him then, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." 24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" 26 John answered them, "I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, 27 even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28 This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

SCRIPTURE READING: Isaiah 61:1-2,10-11

1 The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's Favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Meditation: Do you know the favour of the Lord? Every 50 years the people of Israel were commanded to celebrate a Year of Jubilee - a year of favour by the Lord (Leviticus 25:10-12). God did not want his people to forget all the blessings and Favours he had shown them over the years. Isaiah prophesied in a year of Jubilee that God would send his anointed one to bring his people back from their time of exile (Isaiah 61). The anointed one would bring good news (the same word as "gospel") - news of freedom for those who were oppressed by sin, darkness, despair, and brokenness (Isaiah 61:1-2).

John humbly recognized that his calling came from God and not from man

When John the Baptist announced the imminent coming of God's Anointed One, the Messiah, the religious leaders questioned his authority to speak so boldly in God's name. They asked him bluntly, "Who are you?" and "What do you say about yourself?" They wanted to know if he was really sent by God. Did he claim to be the Messiah or one of the great prophets who was expected to return and announce the Messiah's arrival (see Malachi 4:5, Deuteronomy 18:15)? John had no doubt and no mistaken identity about his call and mission. In all humility and sincerity, he said he was only a voice bidding people to get ready for the arrival of the greatest Ruler of all, God's anointed King and Messiah.

John's identity and our identity is derived from God's Son - Jesus Christ

John the Baptist bridges the Old and New Testaments. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets who points the way to the Messiah. He is the first of the New Testament witnesses and martyrs. He is the herald who prepares the way for Jesus and who announces his mission to the people: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!* (John 1:29). John saw from a distance what the Messiah would come to accomplish - our redemption from slavery to sin and our adoption as sons and daughters of God, our heavenly Father. Do you recognize who you are in Christ? The Lord Jesus has come to restore us to friendship with God and he has made us citizens of heaven - his everlasting kingdom of peace and justice.

Do you point others to Jesus Christ - the one true Lord and Savior of the world?

John was the greatest of the prophets, yet he lived as a humble and faithful servant of God. He pointed others to Jesus, the true Messiah and Savior of the world. The Christian church from the earliest of times has given John many titles which signify his mission: *Witness of the Lord, Trumpet of Heaven, Herald of Christ, Voice of the Word, Precursor of Truth, Friend of the Bridegroom, Crown of the Prophets, Forerunner of the Redeemer, Preparer of Salvation, Light of the Martyrs, and Servant of the Word.* Do you point others to Jesus Christ by the example and witness of your life?

OPENING PRAYER: - Lord Jesus, make me a herald of your word of truth and grace. Help me to be a faithful witness of the joy of the Gospel and to point others to you as John did through his testimony. Amen

CLOSING PRAYER: - "World Peace" Lord, we pray for the victims of the recent Cyclone in Nth. Queensland and the bush fires in Australia that they have the resolve to rebuild their lives and homes after the forces of nature have turned against them, also the war in Ukraine and now Israel with Palestine that those effected have the strength to go on and the leaders of these countries find a peaceful resolution to these wars. Amen.