

Advent III

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[0 : 01] And Jesus said, Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women, there is not risen one greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Two out of four of the gospel readings for the Sundays in Advent focus upon John the Baptist.

And why? Because John the Baptist is the embodiment of everything this season of Advent is all about. In many ways, John the Baptist is the Advent man.

The one whose sole purpose in life, whose entire existence is to prepare the world for the coming of our Lord.

But, but, to prepare the world for the coming of our Lord in a much, much different way than most of us expect him to come, especially around this time of year.

[1 : 21] You see, when John the Baptist first began preaching, Jesus Christ was already a full-grown man.

So John wasn't telling the world to repent in preparation for a birth. For that birth had already taken place.

No, John the Baptist was instead telling the world to repent in preparation for a death. The death of the Old Testament world.

The eventual destruction of both the city and the temple of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The complete and total conclusion of the Old Covenant sacrificial system.

For when Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, as John the Baptist called him, shed his blood upon the cross. There was no longer any reason for any lambs, bulls, or goats to shed their blood and be sacrificed as well.

[2 : 36] For Jesus Christ's death changed everything. For Christ's death was, without a doubt, one of the final nails in the coffin for the entire sacrificial system of ancient Israel.

For after Christ's death, Judaism would never, ever be the same. Because when John the Baptist told the world to repent, for the end is near, he meant it in a much different way than we typically hear those words today.

For John the Baptist was the last great hero of the Old Covenant. Which makes him a truly, truly fascinating figure.

Because everything we know about John comes to us from the New Testament. Even though his ministry belongs entirely to the Old Testament.

Because just like John, the Old Testament was waiting. Waiting to be fulfilled in the New.

[3 : 50] Which is why, if you remember, in Matthew chapter 11, verse 11, Jesus says, Among those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.

But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Greater than John. Because John the Baptist was indeed the greatest man ever born under the Old Covenant.

And yet, yet even the least of those born under the New Covenant are greater than he.

For you see, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as all of the prophets, and most especially John the Baptist, they all longed to stand where you stand.

They all longed to stand on this side of history. They all longed to hear with their ears the things you hear. To experience in their flesh the things you experience.

[5 : 08] And, on this side of glory, to taste and see that the Lord is good, for his promised Messiah has finally come.

Emmanuel, God with us. And even though John the Baptist did live to see the promised Messiah with his very own eyes, he sadly did not see, on this side of history, the once and for all sacrifice that was made for the sins of the entire world.

But you do. For although John the Baptist was the greatest prophet, his entire earthly life and ministry remained in the Old Covenant.

But the New Covenant so far surpasses the Old, that even the least in the Kingdom, the Kingdom that John warned the world was coming, the Kingdom of the New Covenant, even the least in that Kingdom, is greater than the greatest man who never lived to see its fruition.

For greatness here is not defined by personal merit, but by privilege. The privilege of being born in the age of the New Covenant, ushered in by the shedding of Jesus Christ's salvific blood.

[6 : 43] For just as Moses was allowed to see the promised land before he died, but never set foot upon it, so John the Baptist was permitted to see the promised Savior before he died, but never in this life saw the New Covenant brought to completion through the death, resurrection, and ascension of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, the greatest miracle of Advent is that even though John the Baptist is dead, behold, the dead still speak.

And John the Baptist will not be silenced. Through the pages of sacred scripture, through the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and through the testimony of our Lord's one holy Catholic and apostolic church, the message of John the Baptist continues to sound forth, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Repent, for the end is near. Only this time, it will not be the end of the Old Testament world, but something that for many will be a thousand times more terrifying, and ten thousand times, ten thousand times more beautiful, wondrous, and full of joy.

The end of our fallen world as we know it, ushered in by the resurrection of all the faithful dead, and then the life of the world to come.

[8 : 35] For that, that is what Advent is preparing us for. Not only for a birth, but most especially for a death.

The death of our fallen world. in order to give rise to a new world far greater than any of us could possibly imagine. For as we confess in the Nicene Creed, each and every Sunday, I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

And ultimately, that, that is the joy of Advent. And that is the ecstasy of the coming of our Lord.

That day when revelation becomes reality. When there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. When there shall be no more pain.

For the former things have passed away. For behold, Jesus Christ makes all things new. So repent, and rejoice.

[9 : 57] For the end, and the new and most glorious beginning, is coming. It happened before, at the end of the Old Testament world, and it will happen again.

Prepare ye the way for our God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen. Amen.