

Virginia Council of Churches
Week Two – 3rd Sunday of Advent

Witnesses to Joy

⁶“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not this light, but he came to testify to the light.” John 1: 6-8

Each of the gospels refers to the person we modern day Christians know as “John the Baptist”. In fact, though, each gospel has its own unique moniker for this man. For Mark, he was the “baptizer”; for Matthew, he was *ho baptistes*, or *the one who preaches a fiery form of repentance*. Luke used his family name as the identifier for him: *John, son of Zechariah*. But the writer of the Fourth Gospel, identified also as John, uses a much more limited identifier. For the purposes of John’s role in Christianity, the writer of the Fourth gospel describes one who is a *witness*. And in fact, *witness* is a more appropriate name because his primary vocation in life is to bear witness - - to give his testimony to the “Word made flesh”, “the Light that no darkness ever has or will extinguish.” A witness is one who sees, hears, or experiences something happening. When that person reports the first-person account, he or she is bearing witness. That is what we are here to do as well.

John the Witness is very clear about who he is and who he is not. He is not the Messiah. He was only there to point to the Messiah. But since he did not fit neatly into the boxes the hierarchy at the time wished to place him, he was roundly rejected by those same authorities and his message largely ignored.

It is important to remember what Israel herself was experiencing in those days. The people had been without a voice in the governmental decisions about what they perceived as their land for hundreds of years. As they had been in Egypt centuries earlier, they were virtually enslaved in land they used to control but no longer did. They were also living in their own state of sin, which we are all doing as well. John the Witness railed at them about repentance because it is in this act that our souls are made ready for the salvation provided by Jesus. Are we that different today?

Feelings of great pleasure and happiness define the word *joy* which is the candle we light today. The verb form of Joy is Rejoice. Being a witness in the Christian sense is not always a role that will bring us happiness in the typical earthly sense. But the prospect of bearing true witness to the Light of the World, who ultimately grants our eternal salvation, is one of eternal hope, peace and now, yes, joy. Let us continue to bear witness to the truth of Jesus Christ.

Merciful God, turn us away from the distractions of this world. Fortify us against the messengers of untruths that seem to permeate the messages we receive in our world, nation, communities and sometimes even families. Guide our focus to be exclusively on Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



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