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Trinity Lutheran Church
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3rd Sunday In Advent
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WE ARE WITNESSES! JESUS IS THE STAR OF THE SHOW!

God's PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from John 1,

“There was a man who was sent from God, and his name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to bear witness to the light.....The true light, that gives life to all mankind was coming into the world.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Like John the Baptist, we are all witnesses. Jesus is the Star of the Salvation show!

So what comes to mind when you think of a “witness”? Perhaps a courtroom setting! You think of the person, on the witness stand, who is under oath to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”. A witness speaks about what he or she has seen or heard. A witness isn't there to talk about him- or herself. Now a witness is only as good as their testimony is truthful.

You might also think of the Biblical meaning of “witness”, someone who gives witness that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Being a witness, that Jesus is the Savior, gives most of us Lutherans a case of the “willie-nillies”. We think of people standing on the street corner, handing out leaflets about Jesus, that people throw on the ground. Or we think of someone dressed in nauga-hide, and carrying a sign that says, “The End Of The World Is Near”. Or we think of that person next to us on the airplane who tells us their whole life story, ending in their dramatic conversion to faith in Jesus, in the hopes that we'll pray the sinners prayer before our plane touches down in Las Vegas.

The Greek the word for “witness” is ‘martureo’. It means: “*one who bears witness to the truth, even to the point of backing it up with their lives, if necessary.*” And, if you listen closely to that Greek word ‘martureo’, you hear the word “martyr” in it. Why? Many Christians went to their death in the first three centuries of Christianity – all the way up to this day – bearing witness for Christ, even with their own blood: “Christ has died to forgive us! And Christ has risen to conquer our death! And you can kill us if you want, but that’s the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But as Jack Nicholson said to Tom Cruise in *A Few Good Men*: “*You Can’t Handle The Truth!*” Many can’t handle the truth that Jesus is our Savior from sin and death, because they can’t handle the two underlying truths: we are all sinners and we can’t save ourselves.

But how do we know that John the Baptizer’s, and the Apostles’ witness, written down in God’s Word, and backed up by martyrs’ blood is the truth? Simple, Jesus said that He died to forgive us, and that He would validate His claim by rising again. Romans 4 puts it like this: “***He (Jesus) was delivered into death for our sins, and was RAISED AGAIN for our being declared righteous.***”

John, the Baptizer, was sent, under orders from God, put under oath by God, to take the witness stand, which in his case was the Jordan River, and to bear witness, that is: to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, that the Savior of the whole world has arrived in Jesus.

As you might guess, when you start telling people that they need to be saved from their sins, that they can’t save themselves, and that there’s only one Savior, one cross, one blood, and one resurrection that can forgive their sins, and get them out of their graves alive; to many people, who make their brain bigger than God, and who love their sins too much to give them up, are going to give you that “*deer in the headlights look*”, or “*treat you like you recently landed on planet earth at Area 51, in Roswell, New Mexico*” Don’t worry about it. Remember, our motto, if the whole world thinks your nuts for trusting in Jesus, just invite them to join the asylum – because Jesus is the only way to live, live abundantly, and live forever! In fact, the more that people freak out, when you tell them that they’re included in Jesus’ forgiving death and victorious resurrection the more it reveals how lost they really are, and how desperately they need the blood transfusion of Jesus’ forgiving blood to live. Just consider their flying off the handle a symptom of a dying patient, for whom we have the cure of Jesus to give them life. **Pg 2**

It happens all the time. Jesus had to face it too. John 1, ***“He (Jesus) was in the world, and though the world was made thru him, the world did not recognize him. He came to those who were his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who have believed in his name, he gives the right to be children of God.*”**

The religious leaders didn't trust John, nor did they receive his testimony. John was too much of a loose cannon to their respectability: dressed in camel's hair and leather, eating honey-dripped grasshopper legs, and preaching a baptism of repentance, for the forgiveness of sins. But didn't care what they thought of him. He only cared about their salvation. God's witnesses – including you and me - are sent on orders from God to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth that Jesus is the ***“The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world,”*** whether people listen or not, and whether they like you or not. When you love others with the love that Jesus has for you, and you no longer care what they think of you, because you find your all in all, and your ultimate love in Jesus, your Savior, then you are truly free to live, truly free to love, and truly free to die. Many Christians remain silent about Jesus, even though we're all under orders to be his witnesses, because many Christians are still living in the prison of others' expectations, and the prison of wanting the world's respect and likeability.

You and I are sent, on orders from God, to be His witnesses, and to be His ***“John, the Baptizers”*** to our day and age, and to testify to everyone in our circles of influence the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: NOT, that Jesus is a potential lamb, who potentially takes away, the potential sins of the world; but that Jesus is the actual lamb of God, Who actually takes away, the actual sins of the world, by His blood.

Like John, forget about your respectability, likeability, or social standing, those things only have the potential for you to lose Jesus, or keep you from giving out Jesus. Our sin is that we, WHO ARE GOD'S WITNESSES, are refusing to witness; and we, who are God's fishers of men, are refusing to go fishing, with the net of Jesus' death and resurrection. This is ZERO HOUR folks. Jesus has arrived! Salvation is here! Blood has been shed. Forgiveness is purchased. God's gifts are being given out free of charge. But His gift-giving won't last forever. Lives are at stake – maybe those of your own children, grand-children, family and friends. The world still needs John's message, and John's message still works: ***‘Behold! The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world!’*** And ***‘Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins.’*** It still works. Page 3

God doesn't give us an earthly 'Witness Protection Program'. Just ask John. Sharing the love of Jesus may make people really mad, and may even get you killed. Why? You're disturbing "*the peace of the dead*"; *and you're going to have to disturb their peace a lot before they realize their deadness, and appreciate the life you have to give.* Still, God gives us the greatest "Witness Protection Program" – eternal life in heaven!

The religious leaders in John's day had '*the peace of the dead*' – more concerned about their social standing, than their salvation. Nevertheless, they stepped onto the scene to check out this weird baptizer named John. They didn't come to confess their sins, or be baptized, they were "*too religious*" to need repentance and forgiveness – that problem still abounds today. They came to John out of curiosity's, not for salvation. But just as curiosity killed the cat, if you go no farther than being curious about this Jesus, your curiosity will kill you too. So they asked John: "***Are you the Christ – the long-awaited Messiah?***" This was John's American Idol moment, and many prefer their 10 minutes of fame, rather than eternity in heaven. So what was John's answer? John told them flat out, "***I am not the Christ!***" The Greek Word for Christ is "*Christos*". It means: "*The Chosen One*". Now I like Anakin Skywalker in Star Wars, as well as Harry Potter, and I hate to break the news to you if you're fans of those movies, but neither Anakin, nor Harry, are THE CHOSEN ONE. THE CHOSEN ONE is God's only Son, Jesus, Whom God, in His mercy, hand-picked to die our death, taste our hell, turn our grave into a bed, and bled the lid off of His own grave, to one day blow the lid off of our graves too.

*"God said to His beloved Son: It's time to have compassion!
Now go, bright Jewel of My crown, and win for all salvation!"*

John declared boldly, "***I am not the Christ! Jesus is!***" And He has broken into our world, and taken on our flesh and bone, to defeat an enemy far more deadly than Darth Sideous in Star Wars, and far more dangerous than Voldemart in Harry Potter, and that enemy is The Evil One, The Prince of Darkness, The murderer, satan. And as ironic as this may sound, Jesus defeats The Evil One by shedding his blood, because this was a war in which shed blood wins, and the reason that Jesus' shed blood wins, is because it forgives us every sin that made God mad at us, so that no matter how much the devil accuses us of our sin, and no matter how truthful his accusations are, He can't make His charges against us stick, because of the blood of Jesus, "***The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!***" Who is our Teflon coating against the devil's attacks

For John, everything points to Jesus! And every question is answered in Jesus. So He confessed, ***“I’m just a voice, crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord.....I baptize with water, for forgiveness....but standing among you is ONE greater than than I, the thongs of Who’s sandals I’m not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit,”*** so that you can know that Jesus is your Savior too!

But how did John know Jesus? They were cousins. But John grew up in the wilderness, and Jesus grew up in Nazareth, and they never saw each other. So how did John know WHO to point to? John tells us how he knew, in John 1, ***“I, myself, would not have known him, but the Holy Spirit told me, “He, upon whom you see the spirit descend and remain. is the One! He’s the Savior of the world.”*** Jesus didn’t step onto planet earth with a visible aura. He didn’t arrive where John was baptizing with a HALO on His head, or a neon sign that said, “HERE’S THE CHRIST!” But it was the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus like a dove, at His baptism, and the Father’s audible Word: ***“This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him!”***

Now make sure you catch this. The Holy Spirit revealed Jesus to John, in the waters of Baptism. And the Father revealed Jesus to John through His Word. Sound familiar? This is how God still reveals Jesus, to us, through Baptism, and His Word. If you want to see your Savior, hear your Savior, and receive your Savior, stop worshiping at St. Mattress. But avail yourself to where your Savior and His salvation are being revealed, ***“wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in my Name, there am I”***, through Baptism, the Word of God, and the Lord’s Supper; still deliver my gifts: ***‘Be of Good Cheer, your sins are forgiven.’*** God’s Word and Sacraments still tell us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: ***“the blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin”*** – not just our sins but also the sins done to us. But you wouldn’t know that, if it weren’t revealed to you. Just as the shepherds came to Jesus’ manger and found the Christchild, we come to the manger of His Word to see Jesus. Luther said, ***“Even if Christ had been born for us a thousand times across the sea, had it never been revealed to us, all would be for naught. All would still be lost.”*** Yes! Jesus has arrived for our salvation, ***‘Today, in the city of David, a Savior has been born for you, and He is Christ the Lord!’*** His angels still declare, ***“Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth, peace, to all mankind on whom God’s favor rests.*** God is not only *‘not mad at you anymore’* He’s as pleased with you, and as pleased with everyone who trusts in Jesus, as much He is with His own Son. How? ***“Behold! The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world.’***