

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 3: 1 – 17

Today we are looking at John the Baptist. Since the end of November we have been working through the Christmas story and beyond finishing with Jesus being presented in the temple last week.

As we look ahead to the rest of the year and all that God has planned for us we will be looking today at a person and a moment that kicks off the start of the ministry of Jesus which began when he was 30 years old.

Luke in Chapter 1:36 tells us: that John was a relation to Jesus. His parents were Elizabeth & Zechariah - who was a priest in the temple. We are told that John the Baptist whilst still in the womb leapt with joy at the sound and arrival of Mary (Luke 1:41 & 44). John was 6 months older than Jesus and is also part of the Christmas story. He was a miracle as Elizabeth was barren and couldn't have any more children due to her age but nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37). 2 babies, 2 miracles born with a purpose.

700 years before this event a prophet called Isaiah had something to say about this moment. Think about this: Imagine King Edward 2nd or 3rd or Robert the Bruce if your Scottish, writing down that 'One day there will be a church in Peterborough called Park Road Baptist Church'. Imagine if someone wrote about you 700 years ago!!! It's mind boggling and really just shows that God has time and events in his hands.

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

'A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
"Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.

⁶ And all people will see God's salvation.

The time had come for John to enter the story and fulfil this Prophecy.
What can we learn from John and what is God saying to us through his word?
When you turn on the news, you will hear the letters PPE (Personal, Protective Equipment) in the news. PPE is what people who are working in hospitals or care homes and elsewhere should be wearing as they work with people.

I would like to talk about a different PPE.

The 1st P in the story of John the Baptist is Purpose.

Do you feel like you have purpose? Everyone at some point asks that question:

Why am I here? Do I matter? Will I die without achieving something? There were times in my life where I could have died but I didn't, and when I was a lot younger, I was foolish and took risks but knew that I would be ok because God had a plan for my life. That's not an excuse to go out and do something silly! God's word says that you have purpose, you're not a mistake. That wonderful

Psalm 139, states that God thought about you before the creation of the world. Have a read of it this week and let the words soak in. You don't have a sell by date either. God is not only interested in Children, Young people and adults, but he is also interested in the more mature people too. Look at Abraham & Moses and you'll see they were used in their 70s & 80s. God says that it's not over for you, there is still work to be done, words that need to be spoken, ideas that need to be shared.

John the Baptist like a jigsaw piece fitted in to the story of redemption. He fitted into God's story that we are all an active part of. Where do you fit in this tapestry of life?

The 2nd P of John the Baptist is preparation

It's one thing to know what your purpose is and what you are being called to do; It's another thing to get on with it and prepare. Noah had an ark to make before the rain, Solomon had a temple to build before the worship, Joshua had a city to walk round before entering the Promised Land, but John had to prepare the way for Jesus. If the Queen came to visit us here at Park Road Baptist Church think of the amount of work we would have to put in to prepare the building for her arrival. In fact, think about how much work is needed now to prepare our building for us to meet in again. A lot of work and a lot of preparation.

What do we need to do as a Church and as individuals to prepare the way for people to meet Jesus?

In our story today, there was a spiritual hunger from the people. Matthew 3:5 says that people went out to John from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of Jordan. Confessing their sins. The Pharisees and the Sadducees thought they had a monopoly on God and spirituality – the whole temple system and set up with the high priest. What they had to offer was RELIGION. Even an identity that represented Jewish resistance from those Pagan Romans. They can take our land but they can't take away Religion, our beloved Temple! This of course was important to the Jewish people that lived out in 1st Century Judea, Samaria and surrounding regions, even Jesus and his Parents went to the temple, but it had become religion for many. The Pharisees and Sadducees hearts were of stone. They knew the laws and practices but they missed the point. They saw themselves as Children of Abraham and were puffed up with pride. John was not afraid to say what he thought. Matthew 3:7: "You snakes! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" More telling is the next part: Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. The Religious people knew all the right words and prayers but by their fruit you shall know them as Jesus said in Matthew 7:16. John called people to repent which means to turn away sincerely from wrong doing.

People today don't like being told that what they are doing is wrong. How many times do you hear of people receiving a mouthful of abuse when they've told someone to stop doing something they shouldn't. It speaks volumes then that God was moving in the hearts of the Jewish people as they came to repent and be baptized. The Baptism with water was a symbol of being washed clean from your sins, a sign of repentance. John didn't want people being baptized for the wrong reasons he wanted people who were genuine.

Last of all, the letter E means Elevate

John says in John 3:30 He must become greater; I must become less." This was John's response to his followers, who noticed that everybody was going to Jesus in big numbers. John wanted to elevate Jesus to top place above himself. Have you ever thought about the temptations that John faced. He was popular for a time, people came in crowds to him, his dad was a priest and John had his

own disciples that followed him - Andrew was one of them! He could have become good friends with the Pharisees and Sadducees and said what they wanted to hear. He could have lived a more comfortable life but he lived out in the wilderness rejecting the comfort and pleasures that life at the time could bring. He wore camel skin with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and honey. He set himself apart from all of this. As Jesus came on the scene to be baptised he says: "It is I that need to be baptised by you". No jealousy, just a servant of God elevating Jesus to his rightful place.

"Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

It was John that saw The Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and it was God that told John 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.

(John baptised with Water, Jesus with the Holy Spirit – Pentecost). John heard those wonderful words from God regarding Jesus "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased".

Let's elevate Jesus to his rightful place in our lives and in our Church. More of you Jesus and less of me.

In closing, remember that God has a purpose for your life. You're not done yet! Get preparing with whatever God has asked you to do. We may need to repent for the times we've ignored him or for the sin we hold on to.

Let's elevate Jesus in our lives. When people look at us we want them to see Jesus.

Amen