

## God is with us and that gives us joy

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent - 2017

Who are you? This is a question that John the Baptist is asked twice.

This question can be answered on four different levels.

On a very basic level it can be as simple as identifying you by name,  
where you are from or what group do you belong to.

John the Baptist, Son of Elizabeth and Zechariah, from the Hill country of Judah,  
now living in a desert community.

An answer brought back to those in Jerusalem on this level, would not have meant much.  
Just the identifying facts.

On another level the question can be “Who are you.”

In terms of, who the heck do you think you are  
telling us what we should and should not be doing...  
what we should or should not be believing.

Don't you realize that the leaders of the Jewish people are in Jerusalem,  
and if you were any kind of respectable person, you would bow to their authority!

In other words, quit what you are doing,  
because no one has given you any authority to do what you are doing.

An answer brought back on this level would have elicited some pride in those in Jerusalem.

Doesn't this person know that we are the ones who have gone to the finest schools,  
doesn't this person know that we are the ones who have studied under the best professors—  
he probably doesn't even know how to read or write,  
who does he think he is trying to tell us what to do.

On this level John the Baptist would have been a big joke.

On a third level the question can be “Who are you?”

Which is more of an exclamation than a question.

Remember when Jesus calmed the storm the disciples asked,

“Who is this that even the water and waves obey him?”

They were so mystified by what he was doing that they recognized he was no ordinary person.

In the same way, those who asked John the Baptist this question;  
would have seen all the things that were happening—

The number of people who were undergoing conversion,  
the miracles that were happening in people lives, broken hearts healed.

Only if someone who was cooperating with God in a very real way,  
could you explain what was happening...

why there was so much transformation taking place around the Jordan River.

The answer, that those sent brought back to those in Jerusalem,  
would have been something akin to—

I am not sure who this guy is, but whoever he is, he is definitely a man of God,  
for only someone who is closely associated with God could do what he is doing.

An answer brought back to those in Jerusalem on this level would have elicited some fear.

Not fear as in being scared,  
but fear as in fear that the apple cart is in danger of being upset.

For years everything was done according to Holye, and now all of the sudden--someone, who is definitely a man of God, is telling us we need to be doing things in a different way.

Their whole sense of security was in danger of changing.

And on this level the answer would necessitate a choice.

Either we change the way we do things, or we get rid of him.

In grade seven I learned that if the facts do not support the theory, you change the theory, you do not throw out the facts.

But that is not what those in Jerusalem seem to be thinking.

Rather it was quite the opposite— they wanted to maintain the status quo; and if that means taking matters into our own hands and getting rid of this guy, so we ourselves do not need to change, then so be it.

On this level John the Baptist would have been a wonder to behold.

On a final level “Who are you”...asked on the level of...

we understand that you are someone who is not ordinary, and that God is definitely with you.

And if you are not ordinary, and God is with you,

and you are not worthy to untie the thong of the sandal of the one who is coming...

what kind of giant of a person will be coming.

I mean if you are from God, and as holy as Moses, Elijah, or any of the prophets, and you are only his herald, what kind of person will be coming.

I often think of the warmth of the sun on a hot summer day.

If I can feel the heat of the sun, and the sun is 92 million miles away, or 146 million kilometers for you who are metric,

then the intensity of the sun is beyond anything I can even imagine.

If John the Baptist, as holy as he was, could not even untie the thong of his sandal, then the one who is to come must be beyond anything they can even imagine.

These are four different ways one could view the question.

But there is a whole different way of viewing the question.

One taken from our perspective “Who are you”

asked on a Sunday morning in this Church could be addressed to me.

“Who are you” asked in this way

could be answered with I am Jim Kaptein, 9<sup>th</sup> child of Len and Maria, born and raised in Nipawin.

It gives some information but you don't learn much.

Who are you asked on the level of

“Who the heck do you think you are, telling us what we should and should not be doing... what we should or should not be believing..

Don't your realize that most of us are older than you, don't you realize that we have all gone to the school of hard knocks, raised our family in the real world, worked at real jobs, and you probably have never had to change a diaper.

On this level anything I say would be just a big joke.

On the third level “Who are you” could be a comment rather than a question...

because we have seen--through you--great and wonderful things.

We have seen sins forgiven,

we have seen two becoming one,

we have even seen bread and wine being transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Only someone who was cooperating with God in a very real way,

could explain what you are doing in this church.

On this level the wonder and awe of God becomes a reality.

We are not really sure who this guy is but whoever he is,

but he is definitely a man of God,

for only someone who is closely associated with God could do what he is doing.

On a final level “Who are you” asked on the level of,

we understand that you are someone who is not ordinary,

and that God is definitely with you.

And if you are not ordinary, and God is with you,

and you are not worthy to untie the thong of the sandal of the one who is coming,

what kind of giant of a person can we expect to come.

What kind of person can we expect to come.

The answer to this last question will be answered in 8 days.

In 8 days we will be celebrating Christmas.

But the true meaning of Christmas can easily be lost in our social traditions:

Baking, sending cards, wrapping presents, singing Christmas carols, seeing Santa.

But the true meaning of Christmas is not these traditions,

The true meaning of Christmas is the incarnation.

And I want you to think about the incarnation.

The incarnation is--first and foremost--God becoming man—

the infinite, all powerful, all knowing, all present, all loving God...somehow...

in a way that no human being can fully understand--becomes fully human.

And in doing so enables us to be with him for all eternity.

Knowing all this, there is really only one question that we have to ask ourselves is,

When people look at us and ask, “Who are you?”

Do we show them enough of the infinite,

all powerful, all knowing, all present, all loving God

that they would want to join us here every Sunday?