**John 1:6-8, 19-28**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. **8**  He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. **19** And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” **20**  He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” **21** And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” **22** So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” **23** He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” **24** (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) **25** They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” **26** John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, **27** even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” **28** These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

**“The Light Display”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is our true and only light. Amen. Thursday marks on the calendar the shortest day of the year or what we call, “The Winter Solstice.” This is when the sun is at its lowest peak in the sky. The shortest time for daylight also means the longest presence of darkness for the year. In the upper-Midwest, it means we will have only about 8 ½ to 9 hours of sunlight. Regardless of what the watch says, Thursday is going to seem like short day. However, a glass half-full kind of attitude knows the Winter Solstice also marks another change. When the days will now gradually start getting longer.

The blue Advent theme comes with a bit more color on this Third Sunday. A pink candle is lit to remind us that there is to be joy as we prepare for Christmas. God joyfully created all things and it is still with joy He now comes with salvation for a sinful world. Our focus this morning are on those words from St. John, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.” Jesus means, “Savior” but John’s name also means, “God is gracious.” The witness that comes from John brings joy and it still goes out to any today for the light of salvation is near.

1. **Witness how the light lets us see only when being in it.**
2. As the earth waits for the Sun, so God must shine on us.

* Since the Fall into sin, humanity has been in a world of darkness and death.
* The Old Testament shows God sent messengers, prophets, to bring His Word of saving light into sinful hearts.
* Of course, when John finally appeared 400 years had passed since God had sent anyone and so the times were dark.
* Those challenging John’s witness missed the true joy that had come for he said, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know…”

1. The world today still needs the witness of God’s light for us.

* If you have ever seen a satellite image of earth at night, it is amazing how bright the western world looks. (modern era)
* As the same time, this image also raises sadness about how dark and dismal the rest of the world appears to be. (famine, genocide, suppression)
* There is no doubt that we have light, but how does our supposedly enlightened ways block out the light of God? (artificial answers of man)
* Baptism brings that witness to Christ as the One who stands among you to forgive so as St. John says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

1. **Witness how the light being present brings victory.**
2. Darkness never has the upper hand where Christ remains.

* Devilish distraction tempted John when the questions came, but he openly confessed, “I am not the Christ.”
* The light was coming and Christ’s presence was to be at the center against all darkness of sin and death not John.
* Certainly, the baptizer demanded fruit in keeping with repentance, but always in view of Christ the light shining upon sinners.
* Any other preaching directs people away into darkness and so Luther says, “There is no other way to heaven than through this testimony of John concerning Christ” (Postils Vol. 5, 82).

1. So long as Christ is present, He brings the victory.

* You want to talk about what is good for this present life, then consider the Ten Commandments and the works needed to serve our neighbor.
* However, the Law has its own kind of darkness, it cannot remove guilt or shame, or even open heaven with efforts of love made by sinners.
* Salvation is always the joyful answer of Christ, He alone is that light who paid for every sin, rescues from death, and delivers you from all evil.
* Jesus is present by Word and Sacrament so, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

1. **Witness how the light lightens us to shine.**
2. Without hearing the Word, without the message of John, all would have missed Jesus.

* The Baptizer came with water simply, “to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.”
* God works faith by His Word and it is from that Word John came confessing Christ so that others would believe.
* Isaiah promised those in Christ would, “be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.”
* Whenever faith takes root by the Word, a witness cries out so others can see the light of Christ who comes.

1. There are lots lights and words today, but only the gracious visitation of Christ lightens lives.

* Those abandoning the Word for some other spirit or method of man deny more than what John preached, but shrouds in darkness WHO he preached.
* Jesus is the joy of John and it is with joy St. Paul tells us, “at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8).
* A seminarian thanking us for support of the food-cop mentioned his family came from a different church body stating, “What a joy for us to discover the treasures of the Lutheran Confessions! …they faithfully confess Christ and the work He has done for all of us in His life, death and resurrection.”
* If evil prevails when good men do nothing, we cannot stop crying out like John because what greater good is there than pointing people to Jesus?

We are almost to the darkest day of the year. So is the glass half-empty or half-full? Truthfully, the darkest day in creation has already come and gone. Christ died for a sinful world, which means the days are growing brighter for He comes again in all glory. In the darkness, we make our way to Christmas to celebrate God’s joy to the world. The message will not be from John but angels and yet their answer will still be Jesus. A witness now goes out from Christ’s Church to any today for the light of salvation is near. Amen. Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.