**Luke 7:18-28 (ESV)**

**18**  The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, **19** calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” **20** And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ ” **21** In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. **22** And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. **23** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” **24** When John’s messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? **25** What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts. **26** What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **27** This is he of whom it is written,
“ ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’
**28** I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

**“Answer Doubt In Advent”**

Grace to you from peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The third Sunday in Advent is a kind of “light in the darkness” Sunday. In a season for the church, which is otherwise repentant, today shines forth the reason to rejoice. However, this joy coming from the immense love God gives by the Gospel stands in contrast to the rejoicing going on in a sinful world. For instance, there are many celebrating in Seattle, WA how city hall has constructed five “chapels” to conduct same-sex marriage. In response to this joy a pro-life group executive said, “I feel like I am living in pagan Rome.”[[1]](#footnote-1) As much as the darkness does bring doubts over the good news God gives in Jesus Christ. St. Paul made it abundantly clear to the baptized, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”

 If Christians feel like we are in bondage to the ways of sin, death, and the Devil. Then what the disciples of John the baptizer had to face took the cake. He who prepared the way for the Lord, found his way into prison. Herod exerted his power against God’s Word not over the topic of same-sex marriage, but it dealt with his marriage all the same. Where John lived out the short remainder of his life was at the castle Machaerus.

 “Herod the Great regarded the place as deserving the strongest fortification, particularly because of its proximity to [Arabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabia). On top of the mountain, surrounding the crest, he built a fortress wall, 100 meters long and 60 meters wide with three corner towers, each sixty cubits (90 ft) high.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Certainly, such power over John the Baptizer overwhelmingly turned his disciples to God’s Son. Doubts in Advent make us have to deal with Jesus who just happens to save sinners.

 Even while in prison, John prepared the way for the Lord. In the midst of his darkness, the light shined. He drove all doubts to the promised Messiah. He did not cover up his situation as if it were a rosy picture. He did not give hope by his words as if he was the comforter. John did what John does best. Prepare people for Jesus. He did this for his own disciples turning all doubts into one question. “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” It is as if John says, “Put away your false deceptions over my situation, sadness, and struggles. Ask Christ. He is the ‘coming one’ whose glory is to be the sacrifice. ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ Leave me and let your doubting questions cling to Him.” Martin Luther comments, “Whoever is not a Christian even John the Baptist cannot help, who indeed, according to Christ, was the greatest of all saints” (House Postils Vol. 1, 91).

 The question of John still begs for an answer to what we see. A sinful world carries plenty of sadness and cuts short our Christmas celebration. Roman society turned to their false gods and we have ours. It is worshiping personalities to solve our problems. Now God does use people, but no person can redeem us from the darkness. It is the same dilemma as with the disciples of John. Jesus was not as impressive nor the Gospel very glorious. The Laws power, success by works and personality always takes center stage. Yet, none is greater than John! Other than pointing all doubts to Christ, everything else will disappoint. Personalities fall short, people die, and the hands of sinners can bind the best. Yet, John never gave up on Jesus saying, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:29-30). All true preaching takes your questions no matter how great and directs them to Jesus. It is to approach the Word with this one question, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

 There was an answer to the question. John did not send them on a wild goose chase. To put them before the Word made flesh was to change what they saw as God’s way of the Gospel. Jesus said, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.” Rather than fighting fire with fire, as if that ever has worked to save a sinful world. They witnessed how the “coming one” worked to give salvation as promised by God’s Word. The answer to doubts was the “coming one” was to comfort, to heal, to relieve, and to preach forgiving news to poor sinners. At that moment, these disciples of John turned into disciples of Jesus. They were to carry this message back to John the Baptizer not for show or glory, but to be light in the darkness of his prison. It came with a joyful promise stating, “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

 There are always questions and doubts over God, but it still comes down to Jesus. His answer can be a Word of offense by what we hear. There is only one Savior, only one kind of forgiveness, only one light in the darkness. It rests on Jesus by Word and Sacrament, His work in a sinful world. Isaiah spoke what God’s work by the Gospel would bring. He also proclaimed how many would not like the answer given in God’s Son saying, “And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken” (Isaiah 8:14-15) St. Paul shows how the offense remains, “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24). Doubts are far different then from denying the Savior. Jesus speaks to our doubts by His Word and works. To deny Him means fatal entrapment to darkness simply because the light is Christ!

 When Jesus turned to the crowd, He told them they were not going to get anyone better. “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.” He was not a preacher to suit people’s fancy, but a proclaimer of truth. Scripture has promised He is the last and greatest prophet of the Old Testament. In terms of natural birth, the Spirit of God rested the fullest upon John as he directed all to the Savior. However, Jesus being born of the Virgin Mary has far exceeded the birth of any flesh of man. The sinless Son of God resides in a body to save sinners. He does not point, but dies on the cross to proclaim forgiveness for sinners. He is not rigid, but bends His will to suffer in our place having judgment fall upon Him. He not only fulfills Scripture, but is God at work in a sinful world. As the prophet Zephaniah said, “The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil… The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

 This offense of the Gospel bears to offer what Christ joyfully gives as His blessing. It is not for success, glory, or power. Remember, John the Baptizer sat in a prison and finally died. Jesus praised John in this world but still said, “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” In other words, salvation is 100% by grace through faith in Jesus. There is no disappointment, but a promise to trust in Him. His true body and blood at the Lord’s Supper is a celebration. A Christmas that cannot be broken, saddened, or cut short. The Lord is in our midst. He is in our lives. This kingdom of Christ does not change even when the church suffers. The blessing to believe in Jesus is reason enough to rejoice. “It frees us from all blame and makes us to be the children of God, partakers of the Holy Spirit, and heirs of a heavenly inheritance” (ACC 38). This is a work of God and not of man. The kingdom of Christ casts out the darkness by the light of His cross. Doubts in Advent mean we have to deal with Jesus who just happens to save sinners. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. http://cnsnews.com/news/article/seattle-erects-same-sex-wedding-chapels-inside-city-hall [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machaerus [↑](#footnote-ref-2)