



## Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent, Dec. 2020

### Who Are You?

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

[Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11](#), [1 Thessalonians 5:16-24](#), [John 1:6-8,19-28](#), [Psalm 126](#)

Let us walk in love and live lives that shine light into the dark places of this world wherever those places are.

Advent is such an interesting time of year. The days grow ever shorter as anticipation for Christmas swells to bursting. Advent is about active waiting; preparing; staying alert; being open to revelations of the Holy Spirit. It is the pregnant pause between Thanksgiving and our celebration of Jesus' birth.

Advent can also be confusing and unsettling. As the church's liturgical calendar changes to a new year and the readings change from one gospel to another, it is hard to know if this is the sequel, the prequel or, as Monty Python might say, "Something completely different!" You may feel as though you are in a time warp, or a Wrinkle in Time.

We left the Gospel of Matthew [Year A] as Jesus was sparring with the Jewish authorities. They challenged, "Who do you think you are?" "How dare you heal on the Sabbath!" and the ultimate questions, "By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?" In the gospels according to Matthew [21:23-27], Mark [11:28-33] and Luke [20:2-8] Jesus replied to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John [the Baptist] come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'Of human origin'?" They were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John the Baptist as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

John the Baptist had baptized many large crowds of people and he had a strong following of disciples. Because he spoke truth to power, he was arrested and beheaded. Jesus must have been grieving his cousin's death as he was on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that he also would be killed. We know that Jesus would be raised from the dead and that the Holy Spirit was waiting in the wings for an appropriate time.

The first Sunday of Advent in the Gospel of Mark [Year B], Jesus again warned the people to pay attention, keep alert; keep awake, be ready and do not be caught unaware, for “the master of the house” will come suddenly and unexpectedly. Last Sunday’s gospel reading re-introduced us to John the Baptist, and “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” John lived in the wilderness and yet people came from all around to listen to his powerful preaching and to be baptized by him in the River Jordan. John proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In this week’s reading for the third Sunday of Advent from the Gospel according to John [not the Baptist], the powers that be are questioning John the Baptist in the same way they later questioned Jesus. “Who are you?” John is humble and precise. He is not the Messiah; not Elijah; not the prophet. John is only a voice crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord,” John’s questioners continued, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” Again, John answered them with humility, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” John was not the light, but testified to Jesus, the light that was to come. Jesus’ ministry had not yet begun and John’s ministry would soon be over.

“And In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”

John baptized with water. Jesus foretold the coming of Holy Spirit to his disciples. We do not know the hour, the day, or the century. Be ready, watch, be alert, stay awake. Be the light. Shine your light. Proclaim the Way of Love not only with your lips but in your lives. Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest.