

John the Baptist

“Young Lions”

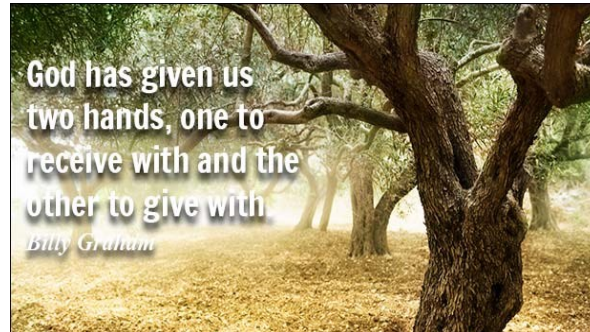


Jesus said of John the Baptist “He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.”
John 5:35

For some reason, I often think of John the Baptist as an older gentleman, but he was young when he was beheaded. John was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth just six months before Christ was born. Even before his birth Zechariah was told by the angel Gabriel that his son would be named John, and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit and turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord. He was told that his job was to prepare people for the Lord’s coming. What an assignment!

We are told that John was an individual. He wore camel’s hair and a leather girdle, somewhat like a forerunner of his from the Old Testament, Elijah. He

ate locusts and wild honey and preached in the desert! Both men were aiming to prepare the people for the coming of Christ, but in very different ways. Elijah was warning people to change their ways, but John the Baptist was telling them that the time for the Christ to come was imminent. As Jesus was talking with the people one day while John was in prison, they asked him about John. Christ answered them: *“Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”* Matthew 11:11.



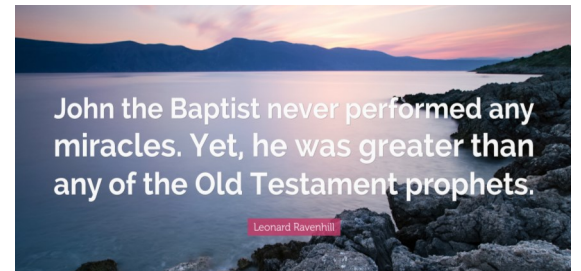
This is difficult to understand when read in its entirety. Christ was also born of woman, but not of earthly man. Then he goes on to say that he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. That is confusing, but I am reminded of the verses that tell us that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. John the Baptist was the servant, but I have no doubt that when he was beheaded, he immediately heard his Master say *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”*

Another Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, said that there would be a messenger ahead of Christ who would prepare the way – *“a voice of one calling in the wilderness.”* Mark 1:2. The phrase and duty of John to prepare the way for the Lord was made into a song in the musical “Godspell” that has become perhaps the best known and haunting songs from that musical, with just a few words.

“Prepare Ye the way of the Lord”

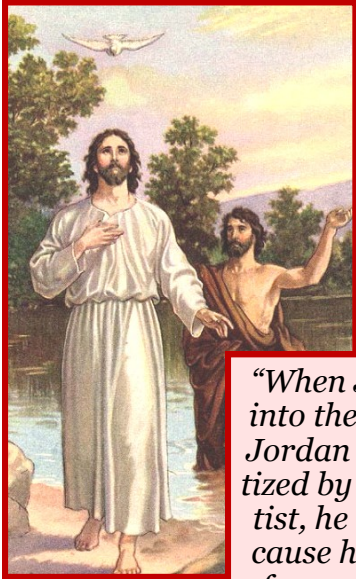
taken from Isaiah 40:30 *“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”*

John was well aware of his role in the coming of Christ and gave him all the praise. John told the people that he was not even important enough to loosen the sandals of the one that was coming. He told them that he would baptize them with water, but the one that was coming would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. At that time, the people had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. It must have been very confusing for this man dressed in leather and camel’s hair to be talking about a Holy Spirit.



One day as John was baptizing people Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee went to be baptized. What an honor for John. As Christ was coming out of the water, we are told that the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and God said *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

Mark 1:11



"When Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan and was baptized by John the Baptist, he did so not because he was in need of repentance, or conversion; he did it to be among people who needed forgiveness, among us sinners, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins."

Pope Francis

John never gave up. He had a job to do and he did it. Herod was afraid of him. After all, he told Herod that he had done wrong by taking his brother's wife. And yet, as we read, we understand that Herod knew John was telling the truth, but Herod had put himself in a tough position. Herod and Herodias knew they had done wrong. One evening after a

banquet, Herodias' daughter danced for the guests. They were very pleased with her dancing and Herod promised her anything she wanted, up to half of his kingdom! She ran to ask her mother what she should ask for, and her mother told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod had a choice, but he would not go back on his word to the girl so he asked for the head of John the Baptist and it was delivered to him. We are told by some authorities that after this Herod and Herodias were dismissed and sent away for the rest of their lives. Some of the people who had been following John buried his body, and then went and told Jesus all that had happened. Jesus responded to the news of John's death by saying, *"John was a lamp that burned and gave light."* John 5:35

When we come to realize that God has given us a specific purpose for our lives, we can move forward with confidence, fully trusting the One who called us. Unlike John the Baptist, we don't have to fear living with a radical focus on our God-given mission. We are not called to do the work of John the Baptist, or are we?

We are called to witness to the love and grace of our Lord, to give light. Some people are sent to the mission field, others to our own neighbors and family. There can be no greater joy or fulfillment in this life than to know that God's pleasure and His reward awaits us in heaven.

Prayer: Lord God, You have given us so much, and yet we don't seem to comprehend. You have given us the gift of eternal life with You, but we often dismiss it as just something that we deserve. Help us to carry out Your mission on this earth knowing that if we are true to You, You will be with us every step of the way and never forsake us even to the day we hear You say "Well done, my faithful servant." Amen.

1. John the Baptist was actually a second cousin to Christ. Would this make a difference in your believing the message he was telling?
2. Why did John dress in such unusual clothes and preach in the desert instead of the towns?
3. Is there a time when we should break an earthly promise when we know it is wrong? How?
4. How is our purpose today related to that of John the Baptist?
5. John the Baptist was actually called to his job while he was still in the womb of his mother.
6. Are we all called before we are born? Perhaps we can accept that yes, we are all offered the gift of salvation even before we have left the womb of our mother and entered into this world?
7. As we think of John the Baptist, we need to realize that he was just slightly older than Christ. Is that important?

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