



OVERVIEW

John the Baptist is the great character of Advent. He came before Jesus to prepare the way. He preached repentance, baptized in the Jordan River, and was arrested and murdered for his faithful work. According to Jesus, John was the greatest of the prophets (see Matthew 11:11), but John says, "He [Jesus] must increase, and I must decrease," (John 3:30).

In fact, the church has most often painted and pictured John in the Jordan River pointing to Jesus. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

In this study we consider the **promise of John** in the Old Testament, and the **birth of John**.

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Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

BIBLE STUDY

Advent, 2016

John the Baptist The Death of John

Introduction: John preached Christ even to the end. John was imprisoned for preaching against Herod's illicit marriage, but even in chains he sent his disciples to Jesus to hear from Him the good news. In this study we will consider the imprisonment and martyrdom of John the Baptist.

Opening Psalm: 86:11-17

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD,
that I may walk | in your truth;*
unite my heart to | fear your name.

¹²**I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with
| my whole heart,*
and I will glorify your name for- | ever.**

¹³For great is your steadfast | love toward me;*
you have delivered my soul from the
depths | of Sheol.

¹⁴**O God, insolent men have risen up
against me;
a band of ruthless men | seek my life,*
and they do not set you be- | fore them.**

¹⁵But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and |
gracious,*
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast
love and | faithfulness.

¹⁶**Turn to me and be gra- | cious to me;*
give your strength to your servant,
and save the son of your maid- | ser-
vant.**

¹⁷Show me a sign of your | favor,*
that those who hate me may see and be
put to shame because you, LORD, have
helped me and com- | forted me.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

The Imprisonment of John

Read Matthew 14:1-5

"Herod the Tetrarch" (also Herod Antipas) is the son of Herod the Great, and was the ruler of Galilee and Perea (the region east of the Jordan River) for 42 years. The occasion of John's critique is the marriage of Herod to his

half-brother's wife Herodias (who was also his half-niece, the granddaughter of his father Herod the Great). (If you are confused, don't worry. The Herod family tree is particularly complicated.)

Josephus (about 93 AD) describes the history thus:

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do any thing he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion

that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him. (Antiquities 18.116)

How does the account of Josephus agree with the Biblical testimony? How do they disagree?

See Luke 3:18-20. According to this text, what was Herod's great sin?

The Visit of John's Disciples to Jesus

Read Matthew 11:1-15

John, in prison, sends his disciples to hear from Jesus. What questions do the disciples have? What answers does Jesus give?

The answer of Jesus is a reflection of a number of Old Testament Messianic promises (see Isaiah 29:18, 35:4-6, 61:1). How would this comfort John in prison?

After the disciples leave Jesus preaches about John. How does he describe him?

According to Jesus, John is the greatest ever to be born, but whoever is "least in the kingdom of heaven" is greater than John. What do you suppose this means? (This is a difficult question. My take is this: John is the last Christian to die before the death and resurrection of Jesus. So while John has to look forward to the death of Jesus, every other Christian is able to look back and know with fantastic clarity how Jesus won our salvation.)

The Death of John

Read Matthew 14:6-13 How many commandments were broken in this account, by Herod? By Herodias? By her daughter?

Herod's family was enraged at the preaching of John. Why? What alternative did they have when John preached repentance?

Consider carefully Matthew 14:13. John was sent before Jesus,

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and Jesus knows that where John goes, He will also go. The death of John reminds Jesus that he will also die.

Go back to Matthew 14:1-2. This entire account has been a flashback to explain Herod's bad conscience. When Herod heard about Jesus' miracles what did he think was happening?



When we have a bad conscience we always see the world in a stained and slanted way. The forgiveness of sins gives us a clean conscience and reminds us that the Lord Jesus isn't mad at us. We receive the gift of a good conscience in baptism (see 1 Peter 3:21). John was martyred with a good conscience.

Closing Hymn Comfort, Comfort Ye My People (TLH 61)

by Johann Olearius, 1635-1711, tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1829-1878

4. Make ye straight what long was crooked,
Make the rougher places plain;
Let your hearts be true and humble,
As befits His holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord
Now o'er earth is shed abroad,
And all flesh shall see the token
That His Word is never broken.

Image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beheading_of_St._John_the_Baptist#/media/File:CaravaggioSalomeLondon.jpg

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