

# "What About Me?"

Text: Luke 3:1-9

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you from our Triune Savior-God. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Is there anyone here this morning that can honestly say they don't take great pleasure when those that they regard as bad, immoral people finally get caught and punished, when they finally get smacked down and humbled? What is it in human beings that seems to find such satisfaction in seeing others "get it" – especially when, in our humble opinion, they really, really have it coming? It starts very early in life, doesn't it? Kids can be counted on to let parents know when a sibling is in need of a spanking. And no matter what kind of bloody murder is being raised by a beloved brother or sister, the non-receiving parties just seem to go merrily about their business – apparently just happy to be alive, and ignored.

The same phenomenon continues unabated throughout our adult years. We're told that in the Old West, main street was never so busy as when the hanging judge was in town doing what he did best. Even today human beings seem to derive a profoundly morbid sense of satisfaction at seeing the proud, popular, or powerful fall. There's a reason the media eats that stuff up, and yet it's a puzzle to me just why we are the way we are. Is it envy, are we jealous, cruel, sadistic, or is it something else? Hard to say, although it is almost certainly something less than a pure and positive human trait. We would like to imagine it's all just a desire for justice, but I wonder if it isn't something much darker.

It should not surprise us, therefore, to find these same inclinations active when we read God's Word. Don't you find it rather satisfying to hear Jesus lay into the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees, for example, in Matthew 23, or one of the prophets of old lambast those stubborn Jews in the Old Testament? So too this morning we get to be spectators as the fiery John the Baptist scorches the hypocritical Jewish leaders who came out to gawk at him as he baptized in the Jordan River.

Only we are never supposed to be *spectators* when we read God's Word, are we? These things were not written for our entertainment but for our instruction. This morning then we make our text personal by turning the attention of John upon ourselves as we ask: "*What about me? If he were here today, what would John the Baptist say to me?*" Our text will help us

answer honestly. That text is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, the Third Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 3:1-9** *In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, <sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" <sup>7</sup> ¶ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*

This is God's Word. God himself has given these words to you, and herein offers you wisdom, strength, and comfort. You are therefore blessed each time you hear God's Word and treasure it. To that end we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

What was your reaction to the first part of our text for this morning – the part with all the names and places in the first three verses? You pretty much suffered through that part, didn't you? In one ear and out the other? Not much there, after all, of any real interest. While that's probably a fair description of our reaction to all those names and places, it's hard to reconcile that with the fact that our God doesn't do fluff. He didn't include random inanities in his verbally inspired word. In fact what God accomplished with those first three verses was to remove everything that comes next from the realm of "once upon a time" and introduce it instead in its historical context as an historical fact. He thereby announces that what he is about to reveal to us is much more than fiction or make-believe. This naming of specific,

known, historical names and places is undoubtedly intended to make all of this absolutely real – as it truly was and is.

John the Baptist therefore wasn't just a fictional character. He was a living, breathing human being, and the words credited to him in our text really were spoken by him. The point here is that the introductory words of our text are not just filler or throw-away verbiage – pointless, useless words – they are intended to verify that the account that will follow is absolutely real. So then just as history acknowledges that men like Tiberius Caesar and Pontius Pilate were real, so also men like Zacharias and his son, John the Baptist, were real. As one lived, so did the other. All were actual human beings who actually said and did the things credited to them in our text.

Yet, again, the mantra also bears repeating that not only are these events supposed to be real to us, we are never supposed to be mere spectators of the very real actions laid out for us on the pages of God's Word. So then this morning, for example, we are obliged to resist at least two temptations even before we begin the study of our text. The first, as was just mentioned, is to resist the temptation to act as a disconnected spectator. The second is the temptation wherein we allow that nasty side we all have to revel in watching others get dressed down or castigated by John the Baptist. We attempt to solve both problems by asking a rather simple question of ourselves: *"What about me? What would John the Baptist say to me?"*

This is not at all an unreasonable, inappropriate, or unlikely question. Several different groups of people, after being cut to the heart by John's preaching, did exactly what we are asking of ourselves. They asked John specifically for advice or counsel as to how they should follow up on his message of true repentance and reform. Listen to the verses that follow our text: ***And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?"<sup>11</sup> And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise."<sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do."<sup>14</sup> Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."*** (Luke 3:10-14)

This morning, therefore, you and I join that crowd near the Jordan River and pose our question too of John: ***"What about me?"*** John then turns

his attention to you and me this morning. How would he answer? What would he say?

To answer we need first to understand the sum and substance of his message. You heard his words in our text, but what exactly was he *telling* both the people of his day and us? What did his words actually mean? What truth was he trying to convey?

His answer: *Be honest – truly honest – with yourself.*

People haven't really changed since John's day. Then they were big on show, big on façade, big on fake. Not so good at reality. You heard what John said to the hypocrites who came not to learn from him but to evaluate and criticize: ***"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."*** The people in John's day apparently gave lip-service to "repentance," but for many that was the extent of it. As far as they were concerned, repentance was great, just so long as it didn't mean having to change anything about their behavior. Again, not much has changed.

For the Jews, their blood was their ticket. In other words, they were going to heaven because Abraham was their ancestor. You heard John's response: ***"And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."***

Is anything really any all that different today? Man wants external facades to suffice. They tried to hide behind Abraham, but our Abraham can look a lot like Martin Luther. They were Jews but we are Lutheran! Our old Adam doesn't mind doing God's will, just so long as we don't have to actually *do* it. In other words, man's natural idea of "pleasing God" is to have God accept whatever man does as "his will."

John's whole point was that repentance is a heart issue that manifests or demonstrates itself in actions. Both elements (heart and actions) are included in John's call for repentance. So too in our confessions we ask ourselves not just about our own hearts (*"Are you sorry for your sins?"*) but also include intentions (*"Do you intend to amend your sinful life?"*)

So, again, what about me? What would John say to me? The answer of the unbeliever is that they couldn't care less what John might say to them. They are part of the **"Brood of Vipers fleeing the coming wrath."** The answer, if you are a Christian, is that John couldn't possibly say enough. While the godless are offended, angered, or annoyed by any condemnation of their sinful lifestyles, Christians walking in the new man have a very different reaction. The new man in us is eager to have blind spots revealed. The new man in us longs to correct *all* that is wrong in our lives and to follow through on our good intentions with what John in our text called **"fruits worthy of repentance."**

So what would John the Baptism point out as some of our weak areas or blind spots? Would he point out that you seem to be burying yourself with material things? Would he ask why God's Word seems to be such a small part of your week? Would he ask what sort of example you are setting for your children and grandchildren? Would he ask why you are wasting so much of your precious time of grace on fluffy, meaningless things like video games, television, sports, etc.?

The point is that if you, God's own child, spend a quiet moment and ask this question of yourself, the specific answer that applies to your life and your circumstances will be made known to you. You will know *exactly* what John the Baptist would say to you, if you actually take the time and if you are truly honest.

But let me remind you of one more thing that John would say to you – and not just a thing, the thing. Understand that we don't have to guess here. We don't have to use our "sanctified Christian imagination" to come up with an answer. John himself said it: **"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**

John's calling was to prepare the way for his Lord – to call sinners to repentance. Yet understand that his true emphasis was never on simple behavior modification; it was on turning sinners to their Savior so that they too might be saved. Robotic obedience was neither the answer nor the goal. Salvation was and is the goal, and that salvation, that deliverance, is only found in Jesus Christ. John's perfect gospel proclamation **"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** identifies the very heart of our hope and our Christian faith. God does not overlook our sins; he punished his Son for all of them. He has declared us to be sin-free because of what Jesus has done for us. Jesus is the Lamb who took away the sins of the world.

What would John the Baptist say to you? You are a sinner, but the debt for your sins has been paid by the Lamb of God. The result of what Jesus did is that you and I will not get what we have coming. We will instead receive the gift of eternal life that he alone earned for us. Amen.

ESV **Malachi 3:1-7** "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>2</sup> ¶ But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. <sup>5</sup> ¶ "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>6</sup> ¶ "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. <sup>7</sup> From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'

ESV **Philippians 1:2-11** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> ¶ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

ESV **Luke 3:1-9** In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>4</sup> As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, <sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" <sup>7</sup> ¶ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."



# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Second Sunday in Advent – December 8, 2024**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 66 (Stanzas 1-2, 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Malachi 3:1-7) God's ongoing mercy and forbearance often give the illusion of indifference or permissiveness on God's part. In other words, since God withholds his punishment for the sins of the godless, many come to imagine that God is indifferent toward such things. Nothing could be further from the truth. Part of our Advent preparation is to be reminded of God's unchanging attitude towards sin.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 96 (Supplement Page 26)

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Philippians 1:2-11) Paul here expresses his delight with the Christians in and around Philippi. Yet notice that even as he praises and builds them up, he also points out to them the ongoing need for Christian growth. Faith is never a static thing; it is either diminishing or being strengthened. Our Lord obviously wants to see growth and advancement in all of his children, both then and now. Our God desires not just our survival; he wants strong, confident, highly educated Christians.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Projected on Screens)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 941 (LSB)

"We Praise You and Acknowledge You, O God"

## The Sermon – Text: Luke 3:1-9 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"What, Me??"

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 317 (Stanzas 1-3) Red Hymnal)

"Alas, My God, My Sins Are Great"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 784 (Brown Hymnal)

"Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!  
**To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

## Attendance – Sunday (40) Average (37) Wednesday (28)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Meal
	<b>-12:00 p.m.</b>	– Annual Voters Meeting
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Advent Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Drew Naumann is considering the call to Faith of Manchester. St. Stephen of San Francisco has called Pastor Del Maas.

**Fellowship Meal and Voters Meeting** – Please remain for the fellowship meal following the service this morning. Voting members are also encouraged to participate in the Annual Voters meeting.

**Advent Services** – Our Midweek Advent services continue for the next two Wednesdays. All are encouraged to make use of these opportunities.

**Council Meeting Notes** – The Council met on 12/2. Offerings for November were \$292 less than budgeted needs and are now \$6,936 less than budgeted needs for the year. A few items remain on the Fall Project List. A second shirt order is being considered. The 2025 Usher schedule has been completed. The Council positions of Mick Johnson and Mark Johnson are scheduled to expire, as well as the Board of Elders position of Phil Pfennig. The 2025 Budget will be presented to the Voters with a 1% increase.