

## **John the Baptist, His Humility & Significance** **Andi Oney**

Hello friends, I'm Andi Oney with Hope and Purpose Ministries and I'm happy to be with you to share about one of the key people that we hear about during this advent season. It's the person of John the Baptist, the precursor to Jesus, the prophet who baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River. He's the figure that Isaiah prophesies, as a voice crying out in the desert to prepare the way of the Lord.

God had a mission for John that is fully united in the mission of Jesus. It's interesting that we know so much about John before he's even conceived. God's idea of John and his plan for his role in salvation history are revealed to his father Zachariah. This happened during Zachariah's overwhelming encounter with the Angel Gabriel, Zachariah is in the midst of a sacred moment. When according to the priestly ministry of offering, Zachariah was to offer incense in the sacred space of the Holy of Holies. And the messenger angel gives him some unbelievable information regarding his son who is to be conceived.

What's been promised to Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth is nothing short of impossible. It's a miraculous conception and eventual birth of a son to a couple who are advanced in age and their long-awaited son has an incredible future and responsibility in salvation history. From God through the angel, we learned so much about John who like all of us were known to God before we came to be. We were all known and made in secret, knit in our mother's womb. Even our thoughts were known to the Lord and our days were numbered before one came to be, the scripture tells us.

What did we learn about John? First of all, we learn that his very name means that the Lord is gracious. There will be rejoicing at his birth, his parents and many others will rejoice had his birth. John and his call are like many Old Testament prophets who were great in the sight of the Lord. But there's something uniquely special about John. He's the prophet who encounters Jesus as a babe in the womb of his mother. He's the prophet who will be filled with the Holy Spirit, from his mother's womb. And we see this at Mary's visitation to Elizabeth. It was at Mary's greeting at the sound of her voice that scripture says, "John leaps in the womb of Elizabeth." And there they are, this first encounter of John and the Messiah. And they're filled with the Holy Spirit, John and Elizabeth even before John is born, he was announcing, he was recognizing and pointing to the Messiah. John and the womb is like David who danced before the Ark of the Covenant with all his might, John, we could say danced in the womb of Elizabeth at the arrival of Mary, the new Ark of the Covenant containing in her the bread of life who John would later call and say, "behold the Lamb of God."

John is the fulfillment of the last of the Old Testament prophecies found in the book of Malachi which states, "I am sending you Elijah the Prophet. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their sons." The very same thing was said of John. Can you imagine the surprise of Zachariah to hear these words that his son was the long awaited gift from God? In this spirit of Elijah, dressed the like Elijah at the same place we last saw Elijah, which is at the Jordan, we will see John. And just for clarity, we hear Jesus himself refer to John as the promise of Elijah to come before the

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day of the Lord. Prophets in Israel have been silent now for 400 years and now John, the Prophet of the Most High is to come. And his mission is to prepare a people fit for the Lord. And how will he do this? By his proclamation of repentance.

John's preaching may have seemed radical or counter-cultural, especially if John were to appear in our day in time, his message would seem radical to many but still carrying the truth of how we, how you and I become fit for the Lord, and that is by our repentance, our confession of sins and the grace of receiving absolution. We can experience liberation and we can have this intimacy with Jesus as John did from the womb of his mother. John is a special man, and we hear the significance and importance of John the Baptist from the lips of Jesus who says, "there is no greater man born of woman."

So, for us, as we walk through this Advent season remembering the events surrounding Christ coming into the world, we take this time to reflect on John the Baptist as the first ray of light into the reality that sin and death are about to be overcome and defeated by the grace and mercy of Jesus. The scripture tells us that John, the child, he grew and became strong in the spirit and he was in the wilderness until the day of his manifestation to Israel. Even though he's descended from a priestly line, we see John in the desert, instead of in the temple as his father was. We can say John is living on the fringe for God. He had no time for the trappings of his social status by his birthright. The scripture tells us he was clothed in camel's hair with a leather belt and he ate locusts and wild honey. He was not conforming to the norms of his time but rather he was radically conforming to God.

One commentator pointed out that in order for John the prophet to come forth with anointed preaching of the Messiah, it was necessary for him to be in the wilderness, to be in a place uninhibited by the world, to be in a space solely to commune with God. And so, he's there for about 30 years until he appears at the Jordan River, where his preaching is repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Many are coming from the entire region to hear this powerful preaching and many recognized him as a prophet. And they begin to confess their sins and are submitting to John's baptism. In the midst of his preaching, he calls out the Pharisees and the Sadducees who were there only as observers not as repentant sinners, and he calls them a brood of vipers. He also went on to make it clear that he was not the Messiah but the Messiah was coming after him. The one who he says, he's not worthy to carry his sandals. In other words, John recognized his place. And in humility, he admitted that he was not worthy of the job of a lowly servant, but his humility didn't diminish the message, it made it all the more powerful.

John's baptism of repentance could only signify the baptism of Jesus that was to come. And John says, that one mightier than he was to come referring to Jesus and that Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit. Something that John's baptism of repentance would point to. As John is preaching in the Jordan, he's stunned when he sees Jesus approach him for baptism. John knows that Jesus should really be baptizing him, but Jesus in His humility submits to John's baptism of repentance in order to identify with us, Jesus doesn't need repentance because he's not a sinner, yet in Jesus's humility and in His desire to identify with our humanity, he submits. And what happens at the hands of John, at Jesus's baptism, propels Jesus into his public ministry.

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It's at the baptism of Jesus that the Holy Spirit comes upon him, rest upon him in the form of a dove and the heavens are open and the Father speaks, "this is my beloved Son." John's cooperation and participation in the baptism of Jesus led to a demonstration of the power of God, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus.

You see Jesus in his humanity is baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is a big deal because from here on we see Jesus throughout the gospels as a man operating under the anointing of the Holy Spirit that's received here at the Jordan at the hands of John by the power of the Holy Spirit. This should give us great hope during this Advent season, you and I have received the same Holy Spirit at our own baptism.

And so this year when we see Jesus and all the nativity scenes, we can remember that the same Holy Spirit that called him forth, that called him to be, that called Mary and Joseph, that called John, Zachariah and Elizabeth is the same spirit that calls us forth to be a people fit for God, even when we feel or don't feel like we're in shape, when we call upon the Holy Spirit he will guide us back to the ways of becoming fit and that begins with repentance.

We are a blessed people to know that truths of our faith. John was a prophet whose fiery preaching was blunt and on point, but John had a heart for telling the truth even if it offended others. We can say John was his own man but in reality, John was God's man. John is the prophetic precursor to Jesus, Jesus who was the kingly Son of God. And eventually it was John's heart of truth that led to his own death when he publicly rebuked Herod Antipas' marriage to Herodias the wife of his own brother, John calls it unlawful and he suffers martyrdom for being relentless in the mission to prepare a people fit for God. There are many takeaways from the life of John but perhaps the greatest is the truth that rings true today. When he said of Jesus, "he must increase but I must decrease."

In closing, I pray that the Lord grant you sometime during this busy season, to be solely with Him as John was with Him in the desert. And may we all have an opportunity to repent and partake of the sacrament of reconciliation so we can fully receive Emmanuel, Jesus the promise of our salvation, God bless you.