

WELCOMING THE KING: JOHN THE BAPTIST MAKES PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S CORONATION

This morning I would like to begin a series of messages from now until Christmas focusing on the Christmas story with this as our theme: "Welcoming the King." This title brings to mind the prophecy of Jesus that says, *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass"* (Zechariah 9:9). This prophecy was repeated again in Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 and this was literally fulfilled to the letter at the beginning of the last week in the earthly life of Jesus, commonly known as Palm Sunday. Although we primarily see this prophecy in the light of the last week of Jesus, I would like for us to see this prophecy foretelling of the initial introduction of Jesus into our world as the King of all Kings. First, we are told to "rejoice greatly." This is what the angels did when they brought good news to the shepherds. We have the spokesmen for the heavenly host speaking these words: *"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"* (Luke 2:10,11). Notice the words, "good tidings of great joy!" Rejoicing is what the wise men did: *"Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh"* (Matthew 2:2,10,11). Again, I bring to you the wording, "they rejoiced with exceeding great joy!" Rejoicing is what Simeon did when Jesus was brought into the temple for His dedication: *"Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation"* (Luke 2:28-30). Rejoicing was certainly what Anna did in Luke 2:38: *"And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."* Technically, we could go back as far as Abraham in this matter of rejoicing, because the Lord Jesus said in

John 8:56, *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."*

We see the early prophecy of Jesus from Zechariah 9:9 was true. There is a tradition that Mary rode a donkey from Nazareth to Judea, a distance of some seventy to eighty miles. Now we cannot say for sure, but today doctors typically restrict travel for a mother great with child (as Mary was); therefore, travel would have needed to be made as easy as possible. Walking could have hurried the process of delivering the baby and riding a camel would be entirely too jolting and rough, so the smoother ride of the donkey would have provided the most conducive travel mode to a mother almost nine months into her pregnancy. Again, this is only speculation.

I want us to return to the phrase that Zechariah gives us, *"Rejoice greatly!"* We know the angels, the shepherds, the wise men, Simeon and Anna rejoiced, but there is one that I would like to emphasize today. And he is a big part of the entire story of the King coming to His world. His name is John. We are introduced to him by these words in the Gospel of John, *"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John"* (John 1:6). Before Jesus was born Mary visited Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist who was carrying John before his birth at that time. The Bible records, *"For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy"* (Luke 1:44). John's witness was one of the most credible witnesses the world has ever seen, for our Lord spoke these words in reference to John, *"Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist..."* (Matthew 11:11a). I bring to you this question: Why did John leap for joy?

I. Because the purpose of God from the ages was being fulfilled.

John 18:37 reveals a great truth: *"Pilate therefore said unto Him (Jesus), Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."* Peter tells us that we were redeemed with *"...the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you"* (I Peter 1:19,20).

Little John the Baptist was now in the presence of He whom the prophets have been telling about for four thousand years and the little guy could not

contain his joy. Later in John's ministry we see him speaking of Jesus: *"John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me"* (John 1:15).

II. Because the purpose of John was being revealed.

There is never a time in our existence that God has no plan for us, not even before our birth. We should not be surprised therefore to find that John experiences spiritual ecstasy even before he is born. The Bible says of the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:5, *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."* David said, *"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb"* (Psalm 139:13). The Hebrew word for "cover" is "sakak" which means to entwine as a screen; by implication, to fence in, cover over, to protect, defend, hedge in, join together, set, shut up. Paul, speaking of himself said, *"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace"* (Galatians 1:15). The Greek word for "separated" is "aphorizo" which means, to set off by boundary, to limit, exclude or appoint. This definition reminds me of Job 38:8-12. God who controls the seas and her tides is even more involved in the individual life of one man or woman destined for something great in God's purposes. *"And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?"* (Job 38:11).

John recognized later in life that he was indeed on track with the purpose of God for his life as shown in John 1:23 and confirmed after his decease by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 11:10, 13-15. I encourage all of you to believe and claim Jeremiah 29:11 for your own life: *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."*

III. Because the way of salvation was now present and accounted for.

From before John was born until his martyred death he was given insight as to the purpose of Christ's presence on this earth. It was John who announced at the very onset of Christ's ministry, *"...Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!"* (John 1:29,36). John, the forerunner, recognized as

did later the apostles in Acts 5:31; 13:38; 26:18; Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14 that Christ was the One and Only One who could remove the power of sin in a person's life.

A. Jesus is the only qualified Savior.

Proverbs 20:11, *"Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right."* Even as a young Child, yes, even as an unborn Babe, Jesus was recognized as the only sinless One who could qualify as the Savior for the world. Hebrews 4:15 points out that Jesus was *"...without sin."* II Corinthians 5:21 says He *"...knew no sin..."* I John 3:5 says *"...in Him is no sin."* John 8:29, Jesus said, *"...for I do always those things that please Him."* Isaiah tells us there was no *"...deceit in his mouth."* I Peter 1:19 says He was *"...without blemish and without spot."*

B. Jesus is the only quantified Savior.

There is absolutely no limit to the power in Jesus to save, for the Bible says in I John 2:2: *"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."*

C. Jesus is the only codified Savior.

Jesus is the only way to salvation as verified in John 14:6, Acts 4:12 and Acts 17:30, which says, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent."*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a large, decorative initial "J" that loops around the first part of the name.