John 1:7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.

John the Baptist. He is the forerunner of the Christ! That is exactly what Zechariah was told when the angel came and let him know that he and his wife in their old age, would have a son to be named John. The angel told them, **“And he will go before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”**

There are a few other things we know about John from the Scripture. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before birth. I like that because this tells us that God is not limited to only those who are born but God can and does know and call souls to faith in the womb and no doubt before that! We are told that John was going to be a joy and delight to his parents, which tells us that even though John was born to older parents and an only child he was not going to be spoiled or undisciplined. Because of this we can grasp that John was no doubt brought up in the schools and teachings of those born into the priesthood of the Old Testament as should have been. But I do think John was a challenge to his Rabbis.

I say this because many of his Rabbis read the Scriptures only from the worldly view and John would have grasped the Scriptures from the Holy Spirit’s view…which means that John would rightly and properly understand the Scriptures. Perhaps that is why when we find John beginning his ministry he is in the wilderness, dressed in camel hair clothing and living off the land rather than serving in the Temple, dressed in the finery of the priesthood. That also tells us that John knew what he was talking about when people came out to see him and he called the Pharisees and Sadducees **“You brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”**

What I don’t know but would like to, is if John and Jesus knew each other and or grew up together. Scripture makes no mention of a relationship at all other than at the announcements of the births of both John and Jesus it states that Elizabeth and Mary are relatives of some sort. Many believe they were cousins. That’s reasonable. The Scripture makes a point of stating that John and Elizabeth were descendants of Aaron, the first High Priest while Joseph and Mary were descendants of King David! In other words, one family was of the tribe of Levi and the other of the tribe of Jacob. Somewhere in there, perhaps in the near generations there was an intermarriage that connected to two families. I think they were either 2nd or 3rd cousins.

So did John and Jesus know each other growing up? They were six months apart in age. That they might have met each other is a perhaps a given. I base that on the simple fact that when Mary was told by the angel about her virgin birth the angel simply announces to her, **“Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age.”** So it is clear that the young Mary, maybe 17 or 18, knew the older Elizabeth who was maybe 50 plus years old at this time and then even went and visited with Elizabeth until John was born. After that, I couldn’t tell you if the two families hung around together. It is a possibility, a high probability, simply because when the Lord tells you your child will be the forerunner of the Christ and you know Mary’s child is the Christ…well, there is just a natural bond there. I would certainly guess they saw each other at least at the Passover celebrations when family gathered together.

Maybe none of that matters. The only thing that matters is that when the time was right John began his ministry to prepare people for the revelation, the appearing, the pointing out of the Christ of God promised in and through the Jewish people. Our theme will be: **THE WITNESS!**

You do understand what a witness is? A witness is someone who testifies to something, usually we hope they testify to the truth. Yet when you take this word as a verb it then means to testify about something or we are the evidence for something. I like that thought. Because in truth, John was not just someone who told you what he saw (because, really, what did he see?) In truth, John was someone who told you about something or literally he was evidence for something. In this case he was evidence for the Christ. He was evidence because his very presence had already been announced by God as the proof that the Christ was here. It boils down to this. John tells you he is a witness, that he can tell you what he knows, that he can tell you why he was around which is just what his ministry was about.

So what did John tell us? Notice our text says he is, **”a witness to testify concerning that light.”** Notice that “light” is not capitalized. Now, study what the Scripture says of John and his ministry. He was in the wilderness preaching about repentance. John was preaching the law. He was pointing out the truth of sin, something that many Jewish people of his day didn’t get. They thought everybody else had sin, everybody else wronged God, but them, they were godly and saintly and God loved them because they were so wonderful. Yet John told them they were sinners. John told them to repent, to flee the coming wrath of God…and remember God’s wrath comes because of sin. So go and study the words and preaching of John and you will see that he testifies to the truth, yes the light, the truth of sin and how every human needs to be repentant and seek the Lord. Realize that John’s preaching was pretty sharp and pretty pointed. When he calls the religious teachers of his day “a brood of vipers” it means they are a deadly nest of deceit and falsehood that brings poison to the souls of people. And aren’t you struck by how people would ask John what was right and wrong in life? You mean to tell me that God’s people did not know the right way? The people, every one, needed repentance and needed to seek the Lord.

Now, you do realize that understanding the depth and horror of sin is exactly how you prepare hearts and minds for the Lord? If you have no sin, if sin is of no account, if sin is just the foolish ideas of backward religious people, then why would you need a Savior? Jesus would run smack into this problem. People didn’t want to hear that he was a Savior from sin. People didn’t want to hear about God and God’s revelations on salvation and eternal life. People wanted to hear about power, about conquering the Romans and being world rulers. People wanted to know how God was going to use them to show his power to the world and then through them rule the world. But Jesus and John want to talk about sin and salvation. Jesus wants to teach that his kingdom is not of this world. In the end, Jesus will be rejected by the very people he came to save. It all starts with the truth and horror of sin.

And as this preaching of the law gains momentum among the people now comes the revelation, the unveiling of Jesus. Jesus shows up to be baptized by John. Now at this point, all that John seems to know is the Christ is out there and that the Christ is the Son of God. He could have known that by a special revelation of God but more than likely John knew what the Christ was from his study of the Old Testament Scripture. Scripture, even the Old Testament is about the Christ the promised Savior. So John knew that the Christ whenever he was revealed would be God’s son.

Please note that John never saw a miracle done by Jesus. What John tells us is that the Holy Spirit had told him, **“The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.”** It is at the baptism of Jesus that John sees the Holy Spirit on Jesus. And it is because of that moment that John clearly and openly testifies: **“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** John now knew that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God and the Savior of the world. And we now know it too!

Consider more John’s witnessing. By the way, he doesn’t tell stories of what he has done in the name of the Lord or take any credit for what was going on in his life. When asked he made clear statements: “**I am not the Christ.”** He made it clear that he was not any of the other false ideas that the Jews had. And what a wonderful statement that John makes when he says, **“I baptize with water, but among you stands one who you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”** Ever given a lot of thought to that statement and its implications?

John tells us he is not even worthy to perform the lowliest of tasks for the Christ and he describes that lowly task as “**whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”** In other words, the Christ is so far above me, so much greater than me that to even to untie his sandals is not a job I am worthy of doing! Talk about humility. John was a popular preacher. People came from far and near to hear him and listen to what he said. John was a phenomenon of his day, a regular rock star and yet it is clear that he grasps that he gets no credit for any of it! The one to be looked for was the Christ! He was what John was all about.

By the way, this morning I read an article by one of our WLS professors who highlighted this section and then says something like this, Notice that John understands his position, his lowliness, that in fact, he must decrease while the Christ will increase. Then he goes on and points out that all too often we don’t have the same attitude and grasp of John. John was giving it all to the Christ, who he didn’t even know yet. But we, we think Jesus needs us. We think Jesus couldn’t get anything done unless we are there to help him. We are going to grow his church or we are going to save people or we are going to be the cause of great ministry. We will be the ones to present Jesus so that the world will love him and just flock to his church! That professor was speaking to pastors and teachers to remind them they are to serve Jesus and his Word. That is what counts.

So let our preaching and teaching be the truth and wonder of God. Preach law. Yep, the law that points out our sinfulness and need for a Savior. Preach the Gospel which tells us how Jesus came and served as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Jesus died on the cross to save us. Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim his victory on our behalf. Jesus ascended into heaven and it is Jesus who sits on the throne of God ruling this world and seeing to it that this world is fulfilling his will and his purpose for the sake of the souls He has made his own.

We are to be like John. We are to be preaching the Christ, getting souls ready for him. At Christmas that means sitting down and grasping that we are celebrating the birth of God’s Son, that One who came and even his sandals we are not worthy to untie. And when the Christ is revealed, preach his marvel and wonder so that people grasp that Jesus is the light and that in that light all men might believe. We are to get souls ready for when Jesus comes again. Proclaim Jesus as Lord and God is what we too can do. Be a witness to Christ, the light of the world. Be a proclaimer of truth and salvation. Cry out to all the world, **“Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”**

Lord, help us to be as John, a servant of your name. Moved by the Spirit, proclaimers of the truth, those who let the light of God’s salvation shine as we teach Jesus as Lord and Christ. Amen.