

## Who Was John the Baptist? 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent (Year B)

### Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11—Isaiah’s Prophecy of the Messiah

1. The Spirit: “the Spirit of the LORD is upon me”
2. The Messiah: “the Lord has anointed (Hb *mashach*) me”
3. Good News: “to bring good news (Gk *euangelisasthai*) to the poor”
4. Bridegroom: “he has clothed me... as a bridegroom decks himself”

### Luke 1—The *Magnificat* of Mary

1. “My soul magnifies (Latin *magnificat*) the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God...” (1:47)
2. “All [not some!] generations will call me blessed...” (1:48)
3. Divine Mercy: salvation is given “in remembrance of his mercy” (1:53-54)

### 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24—Be Ready for the Coming of Christ

1. Holiness: “May the God of peace... sanctify (Gk *hagiasei*) you wholly” (5:23)
2. Advent: so you may be “blameless” at the “coming” (Ltn *adventus*) of Christ (5:24)

### John 1:6-8, 19-28—The Jews from Jerusalem to John: “Who are You?”

1. Year B: although this is Year B (Mark), the reading is from the Gospel of John!
2. John the Baptist:
  - a. Authority: “A man sent from God” (1:6)
  - b. Mission: “to bear witness to *the light*” (1:7)
  - c. Identity: “he was *not the light*, but came to bear witness to the light” (1:8)
3. The Testimony of John:
  - a. Identity: “Who are you?”
  - b. ≠ Messiah: “*Not* the Christ” (cf. Isaiah 61)
  - c. ≠ Elijah: “I am not” (cf. Malachi 4)
  - d. ≠ New Moses: not “the prophet” (cf. Deut 18, the prophet like Moses)
  - e. = Prophet of the New Exodus: “voice in the wilderness” (Isaiah 40:1-8)
4. The Baptism of John:
  - a. Pharisees: “Then why are you baptizing?”
  - b. John’s Baptism: “with water”
  - c. Coming One: “he who comes after me... whose sandal I’m not worthy to untie”
  - d. Who is “the One Coming after me” (1:27; cf. Isaiah 40... God!)

### The Living Tradition: John is Not Contradicting Jesus

Pope Gregory the Great: [I]n another place his disciples asked our Lord about the coming of Elijah, he answered, “...John is Elijah” (Matt 11:14).” John, when he was asked, said, “I am not.”... If we carefully examine truth himself, what sounded contradictory is found to be not contradictory. The angel said to Zechariah, of the promised birth of John, “that he will come in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). This is said because just as Elijah is the forerunner of the Lord’s second coming, so was John the forerunner of his

first; as Elijah will come as the forerunner of the Jude, so was John the forerunner of the Redeemer. *John, then, was Elijah in spirit; he was not Elijah in person.* (St. Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies* 4; trans. in J. Elowsky, 2006, p. 61)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, Year A)

1. What do you think of Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah 61? Does it remind you of any particular episode in the public ministry of Jesus?

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2. Why were the Jewish leaders confused about who John the Baptist was claiming to be? In particular, why did they question John’s authority to “baptize”?

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3. How would you explain the apparent contradiction between John’s denial of being Elijah (John 1:21) with Jesus’ identification of John with Elijah (Matt 11:13-14)? Review the *Catechism’s* teaching on typology for assistance (see CCC 128-130).

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### For Further Reading

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: St. John the Baptist: his mission and message (CCC 523-24, 717-720)
2. Edith Barnecut, *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels Year B* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1993), 10-11. Excellent commentaries from the Church Fathers on the specific readings of each Sunday.
3. Joel C. Elowsky, ed. *John 1-10*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IVa. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006. An excellent collection of ancient Christian commentaries on passages from the Gospel of John, arranged in an easy-to-follow verse-by-verse format.