

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

The leaders came out of the city to the rough regions near the Jordan River to hear John the Baptist for themselves. John had been shouting at everybody within earshot, "**repent and be baptized.**" They'd been sent there by the authorities to ask questions of him. "Who are you? What do you say about yourself?"

Expecting John to make claims for himself, instead he keeps pointing to another, to one beyond himself yet, he claims, in their midst, one mightier than he, whose *shoelaces he is not even worthy to Untie.*

"Who are you?" they ask. And he responded by saying who he was **not**: the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor '*the prophet,*' whoever that might be. Then he said who he **was**: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ***Make straight the way of the Lord.*** And, what does that mean to make a straight way?

In some ways it seems only natural to identify ourselves with the questioners. Often we listen to public figures or people with loud voices and ask or wonder, who are you? or who do you think you are?

Perhaps it would be more helpful to see ourselves in John, this wild and wooly guy who wears funny clothes and eats bugs! Obviously not in our haberdashery, but in our common calling. We too are called to the role of witnessing, pointing to the One who is in our midst who is the light of life. We, like John, are NOT the light but witnesses to the Light. And what is that light?

Go back to vs. 4 & 5 of this first chapter of John. There we read these wondrous words, [***I***]n him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Every one of us (all human beings) is looking for "the light," that is, for a fuller awareness of what is real, for a genuine sense of meaning, a consciousness of God, of self, of neighbor, and creation.

John too is seeking this light and gives voice to the promise that ***the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*** That was and is an astounding word to hear. Certainly not all then or now heed the promise or come to know it. And, even we who have received it in baptism can lose sight of it in an instant.

At the Easter Vigil we light the new fire and from its flames light the new paschal candle, bless it and then lift it high and sing, "The light of Christ. Thanks be to God."

In so doing, we are giving voice to the continuing coming of the light into our lives and world. This One, Jesus the Christ, **is** the light that fills all in all, in whom everything holds together, and to whom we pray for restoration when the light within us is dim and life is broken and burdensome.

That day near the Jordan River John declared to the questioners that the coming One stood among them, though none could see him.

Christ stands among us, even when we do not recognize it. Advent is this curious season of anticipation, that holds the twin confessions of faith: the Lord has come, and yet is coming. To make straight the way of the Lord means to open your heart (and your home) to Christ's coming.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is good news. Jesus still comes in ways that don't quite fit OUR expectations and yet, he is present surprising us with the light of life!

We are called to be voices of hope pointing beyond ourselves to the One born in Bethlehem's manger, witnesses to Christ the bringer of light in our darkness, and to be lovers of the neighbor in his name!

Come to Christ's table, be refreshed with this hope in your heart and strengthened for the journey of faith in this season.