

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Children of God,

I like to drive but the one thing I hate about driving is a Round-About. Sometimes they are easy to navigate but sometimes, especially if there is more than one lane, they can be quite confusing. On more than one occasion I have found myself in the wrong lane and headed in the wrong direction. Since I've gotten a phone with a GPS it has gotten better because my phone will tell me exactly how to negotiate the roundabouts I run into.

God's plan of salvation is sort of like that Round-About. If you don't pay attention, you might find yourself going down the wrong road. But if we pay attention to our spiritual GPS (another name for God's Word) and follow its direction, we won't get lost but rather we will stay on the road of righteousness that takes us through life and to everlasting life in heaven.

Today's Gospel lesson starts with, **"There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John."** During the Advent season we like to talk about John the Baptist. Whenever the Gospel writer John mentions the name John, it is always a reference to John the Baptist – this special messenger sent by God. And he was special. The angel Gabriel came to his father, Zechariah, and announced that he and Elizabeth would have a special child – one filled with the Holy Spirit. He would have a special job – to prepare the way for the Lord. His pulpit would be in a remote location – out in the wilderness and yet I am amazed at the number of people who came out to hear his message.

"[John] came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." The whole purpose of John's ministry was to point people to Jesus, the Light of the World. Jesus was the only one who could pull them and us out of the darkness of sin and into the light of salvation.

When John was asked if he was the Christ, he clearly said no. But he wasn't going to keep the people in suspense so the day after he baptized Jesus, **"He saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."** (John 1:29). His whole purpose in preparing the way for Jesus and identifying him as the Savior was so that people might believe in Christ.

That has always been, and will always be the true purpose of God's witnesses. And John wasn't the only one. The Old Testament prophets were witnesses of God's promise to send a Savior. Jesus' disciples witnessed about all they had seen and heard while they followed Jesus. The Apostle Paul witnessed about the death of Christ on the cross to pay for our sins and the resurrection on Easter morning which is a key cornerstone of our faith because it proves our salvation is complete. *Scripture is the faithful witness that is centered on Christ and pulls it all together for us.* Scripture gives us the whole story – the complete picture of God's salvation for all those who believe and trust in Jesus. Scripture keeps us on the right road – centered on Christ as our Savior.

The testimony of John is clear – and the testimony of scripture is clear. Jesus is the only source of spiritual life. He is the only one who has redeemed the sins of the world. There is no other path to heaven, yet some still prefer to remain in the darkness of their sin. **“[Christ] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”**

Jesus was the **“Word made flesh. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made.”** (John 1:1-3). Yet the world, even though they owe their existence to him, did not acknowledge him as the source of life. Even God's chosen people, the Children of Israel, rejected him as their Savior. Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies written about him, but he didn't fit in with their idea of what a Savior should be.

It's amazing, then, that the world still remained an object of the creator's love. The minority looked to Jesus as the true light of the world and the majority rejected him. An act of self-condemnation for the majority. For God's purpose in sending his Son was not to condemn the world but to save the world through him (John 3:17)

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.” Jesus told Nicodemus he couldn't enter the Kingdom of God unless he was born again.... Born of water and the Spirit. (John 3:3-5). Most of you have been born again – brought to life spiritually through the work of the Holy Spirit and the waters of baptism. You are part of God's spiritual family through faith in Jesus – an adopted child of God sharing in the full rights of sons. Sharing in God's free and full forgiveness and the inheritance of everlasting life in heaven.

So how are you going to receive God's Son? As you celebrate Christmas – Jesus' birthday – where does Jesus fit into your life? He created you and called you to faith. Are you going to receive him as your Savior or are you going to worship him only when it's convenient? Are you going to push him away at times, like God's chosen people?

I would hope and pray that Jesus is the center of your life, after all he gave you life – spiritual and physical life. I hope and pray that you are celebrating Christmas because the Christ Child is your Savior. I hope and pray that you are living your life for Christ – guided by his Word in every aspect of your life.

There are a lot of Roundabouts in life that try to confuse us and mislead us but Faith puts us on the right path – the path of righteousness – and God’s Word keeps us on the right road – headed in the right direction. Follow the signs and live as a child of God. Amen.