

2020 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

A truth is not dependent on the number of people who accept it to be the truth. The fact that probably 4 billion people in the world do not believe Jesus to be God doesn't mean that Jesus is not God. We who are Christians proclaim Jesus' divinity as a truth fundamental to our faith; a truth we can never deny.

How can we be so sure?

Today we go to the Gospel of St. John for help.

The great Evangelist, St John, felt compelled to write his Gospel because serious doubts were emerging within the Christian community of the 90's over the divinity of Jesus. In his Gospel, John puts Jesus' divinity on trial.

Like a lawyer in a trial, St John in his Gospel firstly states, clearly and without ambiguity, that the purpose of his gospel was to prove the truth of Jesus' divinity. He writes, "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us."

John then sets to and shows the truth of this great premise through the power of reliable witnesses.

The first witness John the Evangelist calls forward is John the Baptist. The Baptist is brought into the witness stand and identified by the Evangelist: "John the Baptist was a man sent from God as a witness to testify for the light. He was not the light- only a witness to speak for the light."

The priests and Levites from Jerusalem, like hostile lawyers, question John the Baptist's credentials.

"Who are you?" they ask. "Are you Elijah? Are you the prophet promised by Moses? Are you the Messiah?"

To all of these questions John the Baptist answers, "No."

"Well, then," they reply, "Who are you? What authority have you to act as a witness?"

John the Baptist responds, "I am the one foretold by the Prophet Isaiah. I am the Voice crying out in the wilderness, imploring the People of Israel to prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah; to make straight the way for the Lord."

Eventually John the Baptist is permitted to give his evidence. He says, "On the day that I baptised Jesus of Nazareth, I saw the Spirit come down on Him like a dove from heaven and rest on him. I did not know Him myself but He who sent me to baptise with water had previously said to me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is to baptise with the Holy Spirit.' I, John the Baptist, saw this and I testify that I heard the words "This is My Beloved Son." spoken from the heavens at that very moment.

John the Baptist then went on to say, "I am not fit to undo the sandal-strap of this Man."

John the Baptist was an excellent first witness in this supremely important trial. He was universally respected for his holiness of life and for his integrity. The parallels between his life and the life of Elijah are extraordinary. His memory was still widely revered 70 years later at the time of the writing of John the Evangelist's Gospel.

There would be other witnesses appearing in John the Evangelist's Gospel attesting to the divinity of Jesus, but John the Baptist's belief was decisive and persuaded many to accept the truth that Jesus was the Son of God.

Today we have lit the pink candle of joy on the Advent Cross reminding us that the joyous festival of Christmas hastens towards us. Our focus over the next two weeks will be on the wonder of the Incarnation- on that most breath-taking of all truths: that The Word of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God, became flesh and dwelt among us. That the tiny Baby in the Manger in the Stable was God is a shattering belief!

Thank-you St John the Baptist for your inspired witness to this awesome truth!

In preparation for Christmas. when we will humbly kneel in adoration of our newborn King, we are called by the Church to join the crowds on the banks of the River Jordan and to heed John the Baptist's call to repent of our sins.

This week, on Tuesday evening, we have a special opportunity to approach the cleansing waters of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Come seeking spiritual renewal and healing. If it was good enough for Jesus, who was without sin, to request John's Baptism of forgiveness, surely it is good enough for all of us to humbly seek God's forgiveness and healing in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

In my case, I will come seeking God's energising graces propelling me, in the days to come, to be more fully open to God's Spirit, helping me to live out my priestly vocation with renewed zeal.

If we are serious about our personal growth towards the Lord, each one of us will come to the Healing Waters contained within the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

As we now begin to focus our gaze more and more on the Child in the Manger we know that- wonder of wonders- God is living among us and that He is compassionate. We know that we can embrace life with confidence, sure in our belief that God is with us, strengthening us and only asking of us what we – with His grace- can manage.