

Advent Bible Study – Have you heard John the Baptist Preach?

1. “He was no candle burning in the sanctuary, he was a prairie fire with a stump or a rock as his pulpit. The sun and moon and stars as chandeliers. And the Jordan River as his baptistry.”

Fred Craddock

1. Fred Craddock – April 30, 1928 – March 6, 2015

I never met Fred Craddock in person. I was introduced to him homiletics classes in at Huron College. (The instructor in that class was our present bishop, Bishop Todd). I consider his commentaries *Preaching Through the Christian Year* to be must reads before embarking on sermon preparation. He is the author of several books on homiletics. Perhaps the most influential book for me is *As One Without Authority*. In it he encourages the preacher to abandon the practice of preaching sermons that are the end result of a week-long struggle with the text. Instead, he suggests that the preacher invite the congregation into his study on Monday morning and invite the congregation to engage with him in the process questioning the text in trying to find meaning and relevance for our lives. One of the results of this process will be to leave the congregation with unanswered questions that they can take home with them so as to form their own understanding of God’s word. After all, the gospel belongs to the church, not to the preacher.

My hope for these four sessions is that you will perhaps engage with familiar texts in a different way and perhaps come away from process and perhaps me away with more questions than answers. Perhaps this process will encourage you to view familiar texts in new ways.

The inspiration for this series of studies was a sermon I read in *The Collected Sermons of Fred Craddock*. It was entitled: “Have You Ever Heard John Preach?”

I had to answer was “No.”

I had sung Zechariah’s Song hundreds of times in worship. I had read the gospel accounts of his baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan. I had even written papers in seminary of these texts. I, like everyone else knows the lurid story of his death. (I have seen Straus’s opera *Salome* several times.) Yet John was always a background presence, sort of like the minister in a soap opera wedding; seen but unappreciated and unheard.

Well, that changed when I read “Have You Ever Heard John Preach?” I began to pay attention to John and came to see him as a person of immense importance. Only Jesus and Paul get more ink in the New Testament than does John. John challenged the Jewish teachings on salvation and he has much to say to the church in the 21st century.

2. We begin a four-part study of John the Baptist

Session 1 – His times and his early life

Session 2 – John’s Baptism

Session 3 – Have You Heard John Preach?

Session 4 – John’s Legacy

3. Let us pray.

“Eternal God, Who has caused all Holy Scriptures To be written for our learning,
Grant us so to hear them, Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, That we may embrace and
ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our saviour Jesus
Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever
and ever.

4. Session 1 – John the Baptist: His Times and his early life

Using the Biblical texts, I would like you to focus on two questions concerning John the Baptist.

(a) What do the scriptures tell us about the religious climate during the years between John's birth and the beginning of his ministry?

Read Luke 2: 21-38

And

(b) What do scriptures tell us about John's family and what do they tell us about his life before he began his ministry?

Read Luke 1:5-25,80

4. Final Comments

Your question sheet will contain, in addition to the principal texts, some further scriptures that you may find helpful in coming to some conclusions.

For next week

"He was strange. And dressed in an unusual way- camels hair and a leather band around his waist. And his food – he never went home with anybody for lunch, and I'm sure no one accepted his invitation."

Read Matthew 3: 4-6

"Dress for success." They say that the way you dress has a major impact on whether you get the job or make the sale. However I suspect that if we saw a man dressed like John the Baptist walking towards us on a sidewalk in Sarnia, we would at least try to cross the street or duck into the nearest doorway, yet "the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him?" Explain

Scriptures

2 Kings 1:8

Malachi 4:5-6

Matthew 17:9-13