

The glorious season of Advent – when we look back to the 1st coming of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and look forward to his 2nd coming in glory and judgement.

Last week we saw that the Gospel was for all people. We saw that while Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews, it was prophesied in the Old Testament that he would be the Messiah of all people – Jew and Gentile alike – for all that would believe in him as Savior and Lord.

Now, remember, as I said, following the fall of man and sin entering the world, God promised a Messiah ... a Savior – one who would die for the sins of those who believe in him. We also saw that throughout the Old Testament there was an increasing amount of prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah – where he would be born, what he would do, how he would be rejected and even, how he would die.

Some of the people of Israel had been waiting for the Messiah ... they had been looking for him to come. As we approach the birth of Christ, God had basically been silent for hundred's of years – between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the events recorded for us in what we know as the New Testament – which we know begins with the birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also know that the people of God, the Jews, had been under Roman rule and domination – they were looking for someone to deliver them. But not in the way that they had hoped. Then, at the appointed time, Christ came. As we read in Galatians 4:4-5: “*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*”

Further, we know that 2000 years later people are still looking for someone or something to save them. As I mentioned last week people look at a variety of things to add meaning to their lives – charity work, money, power, sex – but only we know that only Christ has the answer to all of man kinds wants and desires.

We know one other thing – and that is, that before the coming of the Messiah, God would send someone to proclaim that the Messiah ... the Savior, was coming. And that someone was John the Baptizer, who we read about in our Gospel lesson this morning. I know that he is known as John the Baptist, but he really wasn't a Baptist, so I call him John the Baptizer, because he did Baptize people, probably by sprinkling them with hyssop.

I think it important that we read about the conception of John the Baptizer in Luke 1:5-25 (READ). As John grew to manhood – and remember, he was the last of the Old Testament prophets, he began to proclaim that the Messiah was come.

For example we read these word in Mark 1:2-8: “*As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight. John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I*

indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Then we read these words in John 1:6-8: *“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.”* And also John 1:15: *“John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’”*

And then later in we read these words in John 1:19-36 (READ).

It is this same John that we read about in the Gospel lesson who wondered if Jesus was really the Christ. Remember, John had been thrown into prison for telling Herod that he should not have his brother’s wife, and he would soon be beheaded. Yes, he had proclaimed that the Messiah was coming, he had been there for the baptism of Christ and he had heard the voice from heaven.

But for now John had a question – *“Are You the Coming One or should we look for another?”* Again, I remind you that Israel was under Roman rule and they were looking for someone to deliver them. We know, that in hindsight, they were looking for a military leader to deliver them, not a Savior who deliver them from their sins – and perhaps, John the Baptizer is looking for the same thing – after all, he was in prison.

However, we see the response – Matthew 11:4-6 (READ). Think about this response from our Savior – giving the proof as to who he is: *“The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”*

Notice that both aspects of our Savior’s ministry are there. First, we see the temporal or earthly aspects – meeting their physical needs. To authenticate his message that he indeed was the Savior ... God in the flesh he was able to things that no one else could do – he healed their diseases ... the things that they were born with and he raised the dead. No one else had done this before.

I am reminded of our Savior’s healing of man born blind when the religious leaders did not want to believe him. The man, who now could see had a great response to those who accused Jesus of being a sinner. We read the man’s response in John 9 30-33, which silenced his critics temporarily: *“The man answered and said to them, ‘Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.’”*

Jesus did things that no one else could do, including raise the dead. When Jesus arrived at the grave of Lazarus, he told them to move the stone. We read these words in John 11:39: *“Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’”* Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, *“Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”* Or as the King James version so eloquently puts it: *“by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.”*

The point is, Lazarus was really dead and Jesus really made him alive. It was these things that the disciples of John were to report to John.

However, Jesus does not end there with the physical needs of the people, he also addresses, secondly and

importantly, their spiritual needs: *and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

Now, I believe that when Jesus says: *and the poor have the gospel preached to them*, he is not referring to those who are economically poor, but they certainly would be included. No, as always we need to compare Scripture with Scripture, and we should be reminded of our Savior's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, where we read the very first of what we know as the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2-3: "*Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

The "poor in spirit" recognize their need for God ... they recognize that something is missing. When someone realizes that they are poor in spirit, then they will call upon God, and God will hear their cry and come to them.

As I said, the economically poor are included – but not exclusively. Again, remember the words of our Savior as he addressed the rich man who went away when Jesus told him to sell all that he had. In Matthew 19:24 Jesus says: "*And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*"

Those that are materially "rich", and that is a relative term, often don't think they need anything or anyone else. Have you ever heard Donald Trump or Bill Gates talk about God? I don't think so.

And that is why the "poor in spirit" can include those who are economically poor. As we read in Psalm 9:18: "*For the needy shall not always be forgotten; The expectation of the poor shall not perish forever.*"

And so we see, God provides the needs of His people as our Savior has shown us – both temporal and spiritual. However, we know that for those who have faith in Christ, our salvation is worth much more than silver or gold.

And my friends, this is the message of Christmas ... the message that John the Baptizer proclaimed during his short time on earth that Jesus Christ indeed is the Messiah, the Savior of all who believe in him.