

The man in prison is alone. His loneliness decreed by a king who would not be alone. The king wanted a woman he could not have. So the "voice crying in the wilderness" was shut up in the solitude of a cell. The one who "made straight the way of the Lord" will suffer the martyr's death. Herod's wrath will not be quenched until the last of the prophets is finally dead. The herald's head on a pretty platter, the gruesome gift for a dirty dance to satisfy the wicked woman

His death at hand, shut up in the prison house of Herod, the voice will not be silent. John sent two of his disciples to Christ with a question, "Are you the Coming One or do we look for another?" He knew the answer. The son of Elizabeth had borne witness of Mary's Son, crying out and saying, "This was He of whom I said, "He who comes after me is before me." And of His fullness we have all received grace for grace." The Baptizer had baptized with water, preparing for the One who comes after him, whose sandal strap he was not worthy to untie. John the Baptist had poured water over our Lord's head; he saw the heavens open and the Spirit descend like a dove upon the Messiah. He heard the voice from heaven declare, "This is My beloved Son in whom I well pleased." The son of Zacharias had testified that Jesus is the Son of God.

John had pointed Andrew and another to Christ, stretching out his finger and proclaiming, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The one who must decrease now sends two more to Him who must increase. He sends them not for his own sake, but for theirs. He sends them that they might behold the work and words of Jesus. He sends them that they might see, and seeing believe that this Jesus, the supposed son of Joseph, is truly the Seed of the woman, the prophet greater than Moses, the Son of David who is David's Lord, the Suffering Servant, the Coming One who will crush Satan's head and set Israel free from the bondage, not of Egypt, but of sin, Satan, and the powers of hell. John sends them not as one doubting, but as the prophet always pointing to the Promise.

Jesus answers their question. He points the prophet's pupils to Isaiah's words. "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; and the dead are

raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them." See with your own two eyes what I am doing. Do not give up hope. Hear with your own two ears what I am saying. Do not be scandalized. I am the One of whom the prophets spoke. Do not fear.

Yes, the ax will fall upon your John's dear neck. Yes, he will die a martyrizing death. But even in death John shall live. The Coming One has come in the weakness of flesh. The Suffering Servant will soon suffer at the hands of Caiaphas, Pilate, and the crowd. The One greater than Moses will soon pay the Law's penalty and satisfy its guilt, being drowned in the fire of God's wrath. The Seed of the woman will soon be bruised by lashes and thorns and nails. But in that bitter suffering and death He will crush Satan's head, conquer death and hell, and set mankind free from sin's dominion. He will burst open the prison gates of death and hell. John's voice will sing again with Isaiah and Jeremiah and Micah, together with angel choirs and heavenly hosts.

And so will yours. Yes, your life will be filled with suffering and sadness: disappointing parents and children, lost jobs, enmity between friends and family, missed opportunities, failure, loneliness. Yes, you will lose your loved ones to sickness and death: husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, dear friends and co-workers. There are chains of worry that can darken mood and siphon off enjoyment from your days. So, yes, you too will face the wages of sin.

Do not doubt. Jesus is the Coming One, the long-awaited Savior, the promised Messiah. The Son of God has become flesh and dwelt among us. He is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets and the types. Do not lose hope. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead; He will take you and all believers to Himself in heaven. Do not fear. He will not forget you; His promises are sure. And do not be scandalized. For though He came in the form of a servant, and still comes in the poverty of words and water and wine, still He comes for you, for forgives your sins, gives you life and salvation, made you His own.

But even in death you shall live. He who came in Mary's womb and in Bethlehem's stable is the man of Calvary. Back from the grave He comes among you now to speak the good news of the Gospel. Your God is an Advent God. Because you cannot go to Him in your own strength, He comes for you in water and word and bread and wine.

The Coming One came in the weakness of your flesh, blind to the heavenly riches He left behind. The Suffering Servant was crucified for you, made lame by the Roman spike through His feet. The One greater than Moses satisfied the Law's guilt, deaf to Satan's way of escape. He was put to death, the atoning sacrifice for your sin. But He was raised up on the third day, and ascended to the right hand of God, where He intercedes on your behalf.

He suffered your death and was raised up for your salvation. Our Lord is full of grace and mercy. The Word He puts in your ears, He also binds to water. The flesh He gave into death on your behalf, He joins to bread. The blood He shed for your sin, He joins to wine. Washed in the water of regeneration He dresses you with the soft garments of His Father's house. Dressed in the wedding garment of salvation, He feeds you with the eternal feast of His body and His blood. So strengthened and stiffened for the journey, you have His Word that your voice, soon, will join John's voice in the heavenly choir of eternal glory.

Look and see, O forgiven doubters: "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." The Messiah was born in Bethlehem for you. He died and rose in Jerusalem for you. He is coming back everywhere at once for you. You will see Him with your own eyes and your throat will fill the night with songs of praise and joy. So even now, Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you righteous and having salvation. Amen.