

## HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE

John may have been trying to “stampede” God into sending the Messiah by showing how much they regretted their sins.

### On the Power of Christian Fundamentalists

*(Author unknown)*

*Over one-hundred years ago the United States went to war with Spain with the declared intention of liberating Cuba and the Philippines. Many people doubted the government's sincerity. In 1898 some Christians saw themselves as the saviors of what they termed our Brothers who Sit in Darkness.*

*In making his decision to wage war, President McKinley, a Methodist, said, [there was] “nothing left for us to do but to take them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.” (An interesting conception of the overwhelmingly Spanish Roman Catholic Philippine people.)*

*There were many voices raised against military action and the subsequent turning of many of the briefly liberated Spanish colonies into American colonies against their will. Years of guerrilla war challenged our Philippine rule. Hundreds of civilians were massacred by point blank American cannon fire. Among the most vocal protesters were Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, William Jennings Bryan and William James.*

*Perhaps the clearest statement against the idea of war-for-your-salvation came from a Baptist minister, The Reverend H. P. Faunce: “The Kingdom of Heaven is to come as a grain of mustard seed, not as a thirteen-inch shell.”*

### The Advent Blessing

May Almighty God, by whose providence our Savior Jesus Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin.. **AMEN.**

May he whose second coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love. **AMEN.**

May you, who rejoice in the first Advent of our Redeemer, at his second Advent be rewarded with unending life. **AMEN.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. **AMEN.**

**Please prepare St. Luke 1:26-38 for next Sunday.**

## The Third Sunday of Advent



### St. John the Baptist

**Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi;**

**(Called *Donatello*) – Italian sculptor (c. 1386 -1466)**

**Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice**

**Florentine school, 1438**

**Wood, height: 141 cm**

Today's Gospel St. John 1:6-8, 19-28 [Year B, Advent 3]

✠ THERE WAS A MAN SENT FROM GOD, WHOSE NAME WAS JOHN. HE came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He

## HE MUST INCREASE, BUT I MUST DECREASE

confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. (© NRSV)

Or

### Saint John 3: 23 - 30

✠ JOHN ALSO WAS BAPTIZING AT AENON NEAR SALIM BECAUSE WATER was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized. John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, "I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." [© NRSV]

### The Filler

Our Gospel lectionary arrangement uses John as a "filler", that is, John fills in the spaces when a Gospel has too few chapters to be read on each Sunday for an entire year. We read the Gospels in a three year rotation, and call the cycles *A*, *B*, and *C*. We are now in Year B, the year of reading Mark. Last year it was Year A, Matthew, and next year it will be Luke, Year C. In all three cycles we read much of John in Eastertide, but Mark, with his brief 16 chapters, is often supplanted by the much longer John. John is also read this year

## The Third Sunday of Advent

in Lent, in Eastertide and on several Sundays in Summer.

It would perhaps be Spiritually enriching to have a four year cycle by adding one that featured John's Gospel but John is not easily divided into "doable" sections. Scholars believe that Matthew, Mark and Luke were created by collecting and chaining together stories of Christ gathered from several sources. These individual stories are termed *pericopes* (pair- IK- o- PEEZ) the Greek word, roughly, for *clippings*. The individual stories are easy to read by themselves because they were originally separate, eyewitness recollections.

John is quite different. With the exception of what is believed to be a small "borrowed" section in the middle and perhaps a longer one at the end, John's Gospel is the personal recollections of a *single* author and hard to separate into passages short enough for convenient reading in Church.<sup>1</sup>

Those few passages that are easily to read separately are among the most powerful stories of the Lord: *The Wedding at Cana*, *The Woman of Samaria*, *Nicodemus*, *The Feeding of the Multitude*, *I am the Bread of Life*, *I am the Good Shepherd*, *The Healing of the Blind Man at the Pool of Siloam*, *The Raising of Lazarus*, etc.

### Jewish Baptism, Part II ( continued from last Sunday)

Jewish baptism arose in order to replace a sacrifice that had obviously been omitted from the childhood of gentile converts. Jewish Religious law required that the parents of each child make a cash offering at the temple in a designated alms box. With it, little birds were bought to be offered to God as an act of redemption. Of course no such offering had been done for gentiles, so the missionaries, mostly Pharisees, decided to perform a symbolic (not *Sacramental*) washing of their converts.<sup>2</sup> John decided that the rest of the Jews too should show such devotion to God. Some think that

---

<sup>1</sup> To add to the difficulty many scholarly readers find problems with the order of the chapters: What we term as Chapter 15 and 16 read as if they belong *before* 14. Reading John *in course* (that is, straight through) would be challenging and would encourage a storm of scholarly disagreement. For example, in his 1922 Biblical translation, James Moffatt's version of John made no less than 8 transpositions of passages and entire chapters.

<sup>2</sup> Today most converts to Judaism are washed as well.