

**New Castle United Methodist Church
510 Delaware Street
New Castle, DE 19720**

**The Message for January 10, 2021
“A Voice Crying in the Wilderness”
Pastor Ray Eck**

Just a little background... **Tiberius Caesar**, the Roman emperor, ruled from 14 to 37 A.D. At the same time, **Pilate** was the Roman Governor responsible for the province of Judea. **Herod Antipas** was the ruler of Galilee and **Herod Philip** was the ruler of the region east of the sea of Galilee. They were half-brothers and sons of the cruel, “**Herod The Great.**”

The Herods, Antias and Philip, as well as Pontius Pilate apparently all had equal power in governing their separate territories, but all were subject to Rome, and each was responsible for keeping the peace in their respective lands. Under Jewish law, there was only one high priest. He was appointed from Aaron’s blood line and held this position for life. However, the religious system became corrupt and Rome removed the Jewish appointed Annas and replaced him with Annas’ son-in-law, **Caiaphas**. He’s the one who decided Jesus should be crucified. So, Pilate, Herod, and Caiaphas were the most powerful leaders in Palestine.

They were being upstaged by a young desert prophet from rural Judea, who ate locust and wild honey and wore a garment of camel’s hair, roughly woven. His girdle was probably made from sheep’s skin or goat skin, worn about his waist to bind his long flowing garment. God chose to speak through this last great prophet. His name was John, who has gone down in history as greater than any of the rulers of his day. Scripture tells it this way... John 1:6-9:

“There was a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light, that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”

You see God does not choose people by their wealth, power, or beauty. He chooses ordinary people and enlightens them to do extraordinary things. He works through people like John as well as people like you and like me. Greatness, in God’s eyes, is not measured by your wealth and the things you possess, but rather by the faith you have placed in Him.

Do you remember from the Christmas story, when Mary found out she was pregnant and was going to have the “Son of God’,” she went to visit her Aunt Elizabeth and her Uncle Zachariah and spend some time with them? Well, Aunt Elizabeth, who was well past childbearing age, was also expecting a child and was in her sixth month when Mary arrived. In due time, she had a son and named him John. So, John was related to Jesus through their mothers.

Jesus and John were cousins of some sort. Perhaps second cousins. Scripture isn’t clear on this point. John’s father, Zachariah, was a priest of the line of Aaron. So, it was only fitting that John would follow in his father’s footsteps and also serve God. Luke gives us an extraordinarily precise date for the beginning of John’s ministry. Luke, in Chapter 3 says this:

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar . . . the word of God came to John... the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness; and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

“The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar” serves as a reference to the year 29. A.D. This is important because Luke suggests that Jesus’ ministry began shortly after John’s did, which places the likely date of Jesus’ baptism and the beginning of His ministry to be in 29 or early 30 A.D. And remember, Jesus was crucified in 33 A.D. His ministry was only about 3 years. John served as the forerunner or “Herald” of the Messiah and was to prepare the way for him by fulfilling an Elijah-like role, by calling the nations to repentance. In keeping with his purpose, John baptized people as a sign of their repentance from their sins.

He also came to identify and announce that the Messiah had come. In scripture, John says this:

“At first, I myself did not know who the Messiah was; but I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to me and to Israel”

It all was made clear, on the day he baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. At that moment, John says, “I saw the Spirit of God descend as a dove from heaven, and it rested with Jesus, and remained with him. He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is HE, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Messiah, the one we have been waiting for; this is the Son of God.” The gospels indicate that the early ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus both took place in Judea, in the southern portion of Israel, near Jerusalem.

This prophet, John, was a man of high moral values. He was asked by both tax-collectors and soldiers about what they needed to do, to be right with God. Tax collectors came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do to please God?” John told them, “Collect no more than what you are supposed to collect.” Be honest! The soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” John said to them, “Rob no one by violence and make no false accusation of those you serve and be content with your wages.” In short, treat people just as you would have them treat you. Sounds like the golden rule, doesn’t it?

So, was John the Baptist actually Elijah reincarnated as some had said? Well...No. You see, in Jesus’ day, the scribes, those who were the historians of those days, predicted that Elijah would return before the coming of the Messiah. There are several problems with this. Not the least of them is that Elijah never died.

When you read 2 Kings 2:11, you’ll see that— instead of dying—Elijah was *assumed into heaven* by a whirlwind. So, Elijah never died as we think of death; therefore, he could not come back from the dead. By identifying John the Baptist as “Elijah” who had returned, Jesus indicated that the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy was not meant to be taken literally; the way that the scribes of his day understood it. Elijah himself was not to return and go about Judaea, ministering to people. Instead, someone like Elijah was to appear and do this, and that person was John the Baptist or John the Baptizer as some called him. John’s moral values were admired by many but not by Herod Antipas.

The gospels portray Herod as a complex man of great power. Remember, he ruled Galilee. To begin with, Herod had an unlawful marriage. At some point, he apparently stole and married **Herodias**, the wife of his brother **Philip**. Not a nice thing to do. That put Herod in opposition to John the Baptist, who opposed the marriage. Then John told the King that he was wrong to have taken, his brother’s wife. Well, no one told Herod what to do! So, Matthew tells us that Herod had John arrested and thrown in prison.

While John sat in Herod’s filthy prison, he began to wonder if Jesus was the true Messiah. Since he baptized Jesus in the Jordan, John had not doubted that Jesus was the Christ. But stuck alone in this putrid cell, he was tortured by horrible thoughts. What if he had been wrong? There had been many false prophets in Israel claiming to be the Messiah. What made John so sure that Jesus was the one? So, he sent two of his closest disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

The affection that radiated from Jesus was real. Jesus was familiar with John's sorrow and grief and the storms of doubt that John was wrestling with as he sat in prison. He loved John. Jesus turned to John's disciples and said, "Go tell John what you have seen and heard while you have been with me; the blind now see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf now hear; the dead are raised and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. These are the things John needs to hear.

Even as he sat in prison, Herod served as John's protector. He had an unusual fascination with this fiery preacher. Some say that "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. But Herod's wife, **Herodias**, hated John for publicly criticizing her betrayal of her former husband, Philip and her marrying his brother. So, Herodias concocted a plan to get rid of John.

At a birthday party for Herod, Herodias's young, beautiful daughter, **Salome**, performed a provocative dance that greatly pleased him, so he promised, with a vow, to give her anything she wanted. At her mother's urging, the girl said, "I want the head of John the Baptist on a tray!" Immediately, the king regretted what he had said but because of the vow he had made in front of his guests, he issued the necessary orders. So, John was beheaded in the prison and his head was brought on a tray and given to the girl who took it to her mother. Later, John's disciples came for his body and buried him. Then they went and told Jesus what had happened. As soon as Jesus heard the news, saddened, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. After all, John was his lifelong friend and Jesus was deeply troubled. So, John, a voice crying in the wilderness was dead. His mission now completed; his purpose accomplished; he now rests with the angels.

John is just one of many we will see one day in that place we call heaven. I have so many questions to ask him, don't you? Scripture tells us that, after a while, the apostles gathered around Jesus to comfort him. Then, because so many people were coming and going, they didn't even have a chance to eat. So, Jesus said, "Come with me, by yourselves, to a quiet place on a grassy hillside, and get some rest." By this time, it was very late in the day. Once again, a great many people came and sat at the feet of Jesus... you see, they just wanted to be close to Him and comfort him. It was around dinner time and the disciples suggested that Jesus send the many people away, so they could get something to eat, but Jesus said to his disciples, "You feed them!" Perplexed they asked him, "How do we feed them? We have no food!" A young boy nearby offered them the food he had for his dinner, 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread... and you know, the rest of that story.



Music for January 10

-- Bill Mathews, Director of Music Ministries

As we reflect on the Christmas season, I've chosen *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*, a hymn that reminds us to keep the Christ Candle shining in our hearts. The phrase at the beginning of the refrain, "In Him there is no darkness at all" reminds us of our 2020 Christmas Eve service video, when we heard Donna Beltz say... "As we light the Christ Candle, we remember that Jesus is the light of the world. Among the people of God, his light still shines." The phrase in verse 1, "God set the stars to give light to the world" reminds us of the journey that the Magi took to find Jesus. But as we reflect, we also look forward, and verse 2 reminds us to continue to look for the light: "Clear Sun of righteousness, shine on my path and show me the way to the Father." And as follow the light, verse 3 reminds us to do it with patience. So, in a new year, while we are still affected by the pandemic, let us continue to be safe, let us continue to pray for each other, and let us continue to keep the Christ Candle shining in our hearts.

- ***I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light*, UMC Hymnal no. 206**
performed by the University of Notre Dame Liturgical Choir
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=-6C7FzDN6Yc>

Refrain

In Him there is no darkness at all.
The night and the day are both alike.
The Lamb is the light of the city of God.
Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.

Verse 2

I want to see the brightness of God.
I want to look at Jesus.
Clear Sun of righteousness, shine on my path
and show me the way to the Father.

Refrain

Verse 1

I want to walk as a child of the light.
I want to follow Jesus.
God set the stars to give light to the world.
The star of my life is Jesus. *Refrain*

Verse 3

I'm looking for the coming of Christ.
I want to follow Jesus.
When we have run with patience the race,
We shall know the joy of Jesus. *Refrain*

In the late 19th century, William Henry Parker was a devoted member of Chelsea Street Baptist Church in Nottingham, England, where he was active as a Sunday School teacher. One day, his enthusiastic class said to him, "Teacher, tell us another story!" which resulted in a six-stanza hymn called *Tell Me the Stories of Jesus*. The first time it appeared in a Methodist hymnal was in 1935, but the hymn was cut down to three verses as it was felt that some of the verses were too difficult for children to understand – in particular, the original final stanza:

"Show me that scene in the garden, of bitter pain;
And of the cross where my Savior for me was slain:
Sad ones or bright ones, so that they be stories of Jesus, tell them to me."

- *music continues on the next page*

The fourth stanza is also usually omitted even though it refers back to the phrase in the first verse, "tales of the sea:"

"Tell me, in accents of wonder, how rolled the sea,
Tossing the boat in a tempest on Galilee!
And how the Master, ready and kind, chided the billows, and hushed the wind."

And the omitted original fifth stanza:

"Tell how the sparrow that twitters on yonder tree,
And the sweet meadow-side lily may speak to me—
Give me their message, for I would hear how Jesus taught us our Father's care."

Unfortunately, excluding these verses loses the original intent of Mr. Parker, the Sunday School teacher who was simply asked to tell the stories of Jesus. However, even with just the three verses found in our hymnal, it has become a beloved hymn about Jesus' interaction with children. My reason for choosing it for this week's message? Pastor Ray tells us that "John served as the forerunner or "Herald" of the Messiah." Check out verse 3...

- ***Tell Me the Stories of Jesus, Mormon Tabernacle Choir***

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=QRHltbRz7mI>

Verse 1

Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear;
things I would ask him to tell me if he
were here: scenes by the wayside,
tales of the sea, stories of Jesus, tell
them to me.

Verse 2

First let me hear how the children stood round
his knee, and I shall fancy his blessing
resting on me; words full of kindness, deeds
full of grace, all in the lovelight of Jesus'
face.

Verse 3

Into the city I'd follow the children's band,
waving a branch of the palm tree high in my hand;
one of his heralds, yes, I would sing loudest hosannas, "Jesus is King!"

...UMC Hymnal, no. 277



“ZOOM” Worship every Sunday @ 11am

Order of Worship and sign-in information
are on pages 8-10

**NEW SIGN-IN INFORMATION
STARTING JANUARY 3, 2021**

Click on this link (or copy it into your browser):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85010951342?pwd=NldWQnlQUUnRBQ0hRbWdERVN3VitLdz09>



✓ **Food Closet Needs**

- ✓ Instant oatmeal packets
- ✓ Peanut Butter & Jelly
- ✓ Pasta & Spaghetti Sauce
- ✓ Ramon Noodles
- ✓ Canned Soup... Progresso or Chunky
- ✓ Canned Fruit
- ✓ Canned Tuna
- ✓ 1 lb Bag of Rice or Rice a Roni

And remember, store brands are always acceptable.



Tristan Beeson, Pam Whary's nephew, and the Fire Company he's associated with, affected by COVID

James Costenbader, Anita Counterman's son-in-law

Joanne Davis

Richard Hastings

Jerry and Sally Knotts

Tammy McAleese

Ron Pochvatilla

Joan Skilton's daughter, Sue, and her family

Margaret Weyl

Greyson, a 3-year-old boy diagnosed with neuroblastoma.

Those diagnosed with the coronavirus and the families of those who have lost loved ones

The staff and the patients of our nursing homes

The homeless

Those who struggle with addiction

If you have someone that you'd like included on our Prayer List, please let us know by contacting either

Doris Poultney, Prayer Chain Coordinator,
@ 302-378-1184,
or Pastor Ray @ 302-740-3932 or
snowman3girls@gmail.com



New Castle
United Methodist Church
 "Zoom" Worship Service
 January 10, 2021 at 11am
The Baptism of the Lord

If you have a computer, smartphone, or tablet...

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85010951342?pwd=NldWQnlQUmRlQ0hRbWdERVN3VitLdz09>

For those using a regular phone... the number for our Zoom Worship is (301) 715-8592.
 Remember... the phone number is long-distance and you should be sure your phone plan covers it.

Meeting ID: 850 1095 1342

Passcode: 12345. On a computer, then hit "Enter." On a phone, then hit "#".

Order of Worship

The Greeting

Pastor Ray Eck

Introit: *We, Thy People, Praise Thee*

Bill Mathews

Verse 1

We, thy people, praise thee, praise thee,
 God of every nation!
 We, thy people, praise thee, praise thee,
 Lord of Hosts eternal!
 Days of wonder, days of beauty,
 days of rapture filled with light
 tell thy goodness, tell thy mercies,
 tell thy glorious might.
 We, thy people praise thee, praise thee,
 praise thee evermore.

Verse 2

We, thy people, praise thee, praise thee,
 God of every nation!
 We, thy people, praise thee, praise thee,
 Lord of Hosts eternal!
 For thy blessings, for thy bounty,
 joyful songs to thee we sing,
 songs of glory, songs of triumph
 to our God and King.
 We, thy people praise thee, praise thee,
 praise thee evermore.

UMC Hymnal, no. 67

- *...our service continues on the next page*

Call to Worship

Pastor Ray and Melanie Loper, Liturgist

Pastor: In remembering your own baptism; Do you believe in God the Father?

Liturgist: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of the heavens and earth.

Pastor: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

Liturgist: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He ascended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Pastor: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

Liturgist: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Universal Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Melanie Loper

Living God, when the spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan's water, you revealed him as your own beloved Son. That day, you anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Grant that all who are baptized in His name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, now and forever. Amen.

Please "unmute" your device as we enter our time of prayer.

Our Joys and Concerns

Pastor Ray

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Please place your device back on "mute after the Lord's Prayer."

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 3:1-17

Melanie Loper

Liturgist: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

People: Thanks Be to God, Amen!

The Message: "A Voice Crying in the Wilderness"

Pastor Ray

Benediction

Pastor Ray

God has laid claim to your life.
By your baptism you have been marked as God's own, forever.
In grace, may God watch over you.
In strength, may you go forth in service to others.

- *...our service continues on the next page*

Closing Hymn: *Blessed Be the God of Israel*

Bill Mathews

Verse 1

Blessed be the God of Israel, who comes
to set us free,
Who visits and redeems us, and grants
us liberty.
The prophets spoke of mercy, of
freedom and release;
God shall fulfill the promise to bring our
people peace.

Verse 2

Now from the house of David a child of
grace is given;
A Savior comes among us to raise us up
to heaven.
Before Him goes the herald, forerunner
in the way,
The prophet of salvation, the messenger
of day.

Verse 3

Where once were fear and darkness the sun begins to rise,
The dawning of forgiveness upon the sinner's eyes,
To guide the feet of pilgrims along the paths of peace;
O bless our God and Savior, with songs that never cease!

UMC Hymnal, no. 209