

40-03-03.wpd—John's Announcement of Christ  
 Epiphany, prophets, OT, NT, Messiah, ministry, message, repentance  
 Matthew 3:1-12  
 Jesus is the One the world is waiting for.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (text as Scripture reading)

–This **text** is not technically an Epiphany passage, but merely “John’s Announcement of Christ” (**title**). It describes the ministry and message of John the Baptist, who is a key character in discovering the meaning of Christ’s baptism as an Epiphany passage. You remember “epiphany” means an unveiling, a revealing, a manifestation or presentation. What is it about John that made him someone qualified to introduce Christ to the world? And perhaps in answering that we can learn about how we are to make known to our realm of influence that HOM.idea.

### **I. John Had a Prophetic Ministry**

- A. Although John is the NT portion of Scripture, we call him the last prophet of the OT,? Why? *Because he looked like one...*
1. He was dressed like an OT prophet [like Elijah], which *signified OT atonement* [*kaphar=covering*]– **v.4a**, *John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. [Adam & Eve clothed themselves with hand-woven plant material (textiles), but God covered them with the hides of slain animals, just as later He gave in the Law a covering or atonement by sacrificially slain animals.]*
  2. His diet also had prophetic *significance*– **v.4b**, *His food was locusts*
    - a. It *signified* God’s past *judgment* (Judgment often came from “plagues of locusts.” John literally fed himself on that knowledge.)
    - b. It *predicted* future *mercy*– “wild honey” [**Gk. word** for *tree honey*, not bee-keeper honey] (**On Calvary’s Tree, Christ “tasted death for every man” so that from the sweet salvation purchased there everyone might “taste and see that the Lord is good.”**)
- B. His *prophetic ministry* set the spiritual stage for Christ’s ministry
1. He fit Isaiah’s description of the prophet who would “*prepare the way for the Lord*”– **v.3**, *This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” (A prophetic ministry urges people to get their minds and lives in line with God’s point of view.)*
  2. Just as other OT prophets before him, he was bold in confronting

those who were abusing their positions of religious power–**v.7**, *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? (Also like the OT prophets, he suffered for confronting the sins of political rulers– Luke 3:19-20, But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.)*

**TRANS:** John knew his calling. His reply to the Jewish leaders shows he clearly recognized his *prophetic ministry*– **John 1:22-23**, Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” **John knew that he was to get people ready for the long-awaited Messiah. We have that same prophetic ministry**, to proclaim that **Jesus is the One the world is waiting for. Luke 3:2** says, “the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.” **He spent time alone with God** learning to hear and listen to His voice. **We need the same discipline** to hear from God how our own lives can be a sign of our *prophetic ministry* for Christ.

### **II. John Had a Prophetic Message**

- A. John’s *message of repentance* is the same one we must proclaim to “*prepare the way for the Lord*” in people’s lives– **v.2**, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*” [*repentance* literally means “*a changed mind*”]
1. What *change of mind* is God after? (If a *prophetic ministry* urges people to get their minds and lives in line with God’s point of view, then a *prophetic message* must describe God’s viewpoint.)
  2. God’s viewpoint is *internal*, when many times ours is *external*:
    - a. “*Confessing their sins*” and being “*baptized ... in the Jordan River*” was the evidence of a real heart change for many who heard John.
    - b. **But John diagnosed the problem of “the Pharisees and Sadducees”** who came to watch– **v.9**, do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. (*Status, position, achievement, reputation... these can all be a mask behind which sinners hide hearts and lives that are not in line with God’s viewpoint.*)
  3. John’s message had some “bad news” and some “good news” for his listeners, depending on how they responded to the *prophetic*

message he proclaimed:

- a. In God's view, there's no place in His Kingdom for hearts that will not (v.8) "produce fruit in keeping with repentance"– v.10, *The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.* (That's "bad news" for those with minds and hearts of unrepentance.)
- b. But the "good news" is that there is One coming who can bring the ultimate holiness for which baptism is only a symbol– v.11, *"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."*
  - (1) The Jewish mind understood the ancient *mikveh* baptism; it was a complete naked bath in flowing water, and it made a person ritually clean.] John not only gave the *mikveh* a new meaning of repentance, but announced that God would not stop there.
  - (2) The One coming would go beyond a water bath, to immerse repentant hearts in the fire of God's Holy Spirit and bring them to the state of holiness fit for His Kingdom.
- c. John's *prophetic message* was that this coming One would bring about a two-way division between the *repentant* and the *unrepentant*– v.12, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

### CONCLUSION:

–[When I read Longfellow's translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, it was hard getting through the *Inferno*, or even *Purgatorio*, but *Paradiso* was like arriving home.] Nobody likes to think or talk about Hell. Some call this life Hell or maybe Purgatory. But it doesn't have to be that way.

–Luke 3:18 says, And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them. The "good news" is, We don't have to wait to get to Heaven to start living in *Paradiso*. **Jesus is the One the world has been waiting for.** All we have to do is get our minds and lives in line with God's point of view, as John preached. And, as John set the stage for revealing Christ to the world, so we can help people have an epiphany of Christ, as we obey our calling to listen to God and share the prophetic message of Christ with others.

Matthew 3:1-12 ( NIV )

1In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

3This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

4John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

5People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

6Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

8Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

9And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

10The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

11"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

12His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."