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John the Baptist and Advent

Abstract

"There are a myriad of different ways you can infuse a little counter-cultural, John the Baptist-ish influence into your Advent. Cultivating gratitude, practicing integrity in every area of your life, and helping the poor are just a few ideas."

Posting about the spirit of the Advent season from In All Things - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/john-the-baptist-and-advent/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

John the Baptist and Advent

 allthings.org/john-the-baptist-and-advent/

Aaron Baart

This is post 9 of 9 in the series “*Advent Devotions*”

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9. John the Baptist and Advent

Starting on Thanksgiving weekend every year, all the classic Christmas movies start playing again on TV. Along with the rest of my family, I have my perennial favorites. In the 1989 film, “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation,” Chevy Chase plays Clark W. Griswald, a father who fails repeatedly as he tries way too hard to create the perfect family Christmas. From the over-the-top 250 strings of Christmas lights on his house to his absolute obsession with finding the perfect tree, the character is beyond fascinated with preparing his home and family for the perfect Christmas.

At this time of year, we busy ourselves with all sorts of family traditions, shopping, holiday baking, house-decorating, and gift wrapping. Our children’s Advent calendars may open a cardboard door each day to a chocolate treat, but Advent’s other timer is a countdown clock, ticking off the number of shopping days left until we all sit around a tree and open gifts. And so with a deadline looming, the season takes on a preparatory nature with each of us relating, at least in some regard, to Clark Griswald’s desire to make sure we got everything prepared as right as we possibly could.

In the Biblical story, John the Baptist makes Clark Griswald’s Christmas preparation obsession seem ridiculously miniscule. If ever there was a character who personified the season of Advent, it was John. His life, ministry, and teaching all centered around preparing for the coming Messiah. In fact, even before his birth, we are told that his life would essentially become the personification of Advent.

But John’s version of Christmas preparation stands in stark contrast to our cultural one today. As recorded in Luke’s Gospel, his message of preparation sounded like this:

3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

*“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,*

*make straight paths for him.
5 Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
6 And all people will see God's salvation.'"*

7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 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."

10 "What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

11 John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Notice that within the passage, John's message of preparation for meeting Jesus has everything to do with being content with what we already have. In fact, he suggests we give even more of it away! Comparatively, our cultural acts of Christmas preparation stand in direct contradiction to the Biblical story. We make lists of the stuff we "need" to get. John rattles off the stuff we should be thankful for and things we should give away. Even in the story of the wise men (which I've often heard explained as the reason for gift-giving at Christmas), they come to bring gifts to Jesus rather than staying home and merely exchanging them with each other.

As Christians, should our holiday traditions and gift-giving practices be re-evaluated in light of the Scriptural story? Don't get me wrong, I'm not aiming for a Bah Humbug holiday and I'm not trying to steal the fun out of Christmas. I'm just suggesting that if we really want to get the most out of Christmas this year, maybe following the Advent model of the Baptizer rather than Clark Griswald will give our hearts what we're really hoping for this year.

There are a myriad of different ways you can infuse a little counter-cultural, John the Baptist-ish influence into your Advent. Cultivating gratitude, practicing integrity in every area of your life, and helping the poor are just a few ideas. Or, what if you specifically aimed to give away more than you receive? What if by the time the New Year rolled around, you were lighter on your feet in the things on this world? How about this: for every one thing that comes in your house this holiday season, try giving the equivalent, or better yet, even more than that, away.

Now we're getting closer to the Spirit of the season.