

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

John was a miracle baby.
John the Baptizer or John the Baptist was a special gift.
His parents were thrilled by his *angel heralded* birth; however, he was Not just a blessing to them. John was a gift to all people.

John was in God's extraordinary plan. **He was chosen!**
Before his birth he was consecrated and commissioned to do great things for God. Much was expected from John.

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~Can you imagine growing up with that burden?  
Just think of the pressure and expectation he had to endure.

As a young boy, I bet his mother would call out to him, "John! You put down that hockey stick. You know better than to play that violent game. You can risk getting hurt. Everyone is depending on you to do great things for God.  
Don't squander that on such a silly, dangerous game."

And then later, at school, a friend would quietly come to him, and ask, "John, you're God's chosen one, do you mind changing my Failing grade into an A?"  
In frustration, John would reply, "You know I can't do that.  
Yes, I'm A chosen one, but the one coming after me has much greater power. I'm not worthy to even tie his shoe laces.  
Go ask him for a miracle when he comes."

To be sure, dating was impossible. Who could he trust as being sincere. All the girls wanted to be close to "God's chosen One."  
And, John was chosen by God / sanctified to do great things for God.

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Is it any wonder that, after high school, John fled out into the wilderness to live / to be left alone?

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While in the wilderness, there's no doubt, God was calling him to go out and confront people / to expose their sins and demand that they change their ways.

John likely argued with God:  
"Hey God, Nobody wants to hear gloom and doom!  
The economy is booming. Sure, everyone hates the Romans, and they dread the drones flying by, but the Romans are investing big time in Palestine. People don't want to change; they want to get a piece of the pie. They don't want to repent."

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You can hide from people, but it's almost impossible to hide from God, especially when God has plans for you.

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Unable to resist God's insistent persistence, John came out of the wilderness, albeit.... a little rough on the edges.

He was Not a "sharp dressed man", and his hair did its own thing.

Still, he went forth, as God lead him, loudly and boldly preaching to people to repent and be baptized.

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Turns out, his "wilderness" look worked for him.

He looked the message.

His appearance got people's attention, and they listened to him.

It was part of his persona.

If an image works for a public person, then it's usually used.

A honed guise can be effective.

Don Cherry always wears something outrageous; it's part of how he's identified. People would be disappointed if he looked normal, and they likely won't listen to him either.

Shane Claiborne is expected to look a certain way when he speaks, and he keeps "that" appearance.... because it's part of his persona.

Looking wild was an X factor for John.

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So, not surprisingly, John did have his admirers / his groupies. He was becoming famous, yet he knew his roll.

John was preparing the way. He was doing groundwork for the main event--Jesus--THE Chosen one.

John did essential work. He got the place ready.

People were made ready to hear what Jesus had to say, because of John.

Therefore, Jesus Needed John, and that is clear.

Jesus NEEDED John.

God knew that, and that's why God created and called John.

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Nevertheless, the time came for Jesus to appear publically and for John to fade away.

John did his part. He was faithful, but NOW Jesus was in the light.

Jesus was the light, and he had great powers. He helped and cured people. All eyes were on Jesus.

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It is more than normal to focus on the main event and all the glory and amazing things were and are experienced.

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In Isaiah 35, verses 1, 2 and 5 through 10 stand out:

--wilderness will blossom and bear fruit:

-- the blind will see;

-- there will be nothing to fear and the people will sing for Joy.

That's wonderful stuff!!

Yet, it is prudent to also read verses 3 and 4, because those two verses layout the ground work / the preparation necessary in order for all that Glory stuff to happen.

Verses 3 and 4 are the do list, the other verses are the successful results / the celebration.

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Verse 3 states that we must strengthen the feeble / empower the weak. In other words, We do service and Justice!

Doing serving and justice are part of the foundation.

Verse 4 is about proclamation. It's a requirement to introduce God into all situations.

Speaking, preaching, telling people about God is the other part of the foundation.

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Oh,.....but it's much more desirable to brush over that and read about the "rejoicing" parts.

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Typically, we don't think about the "behind the scenes" preparation.

We notice how a house looks, it's features and decor, and rarely think about the person who worked on the foundation or hammered in the studs.

A concert is exciting to experience. I wish I could have heard Paul McCartney perform in Regina, this past summer.

Yet, how much attention and appreciation did the roadies get.

They unloaded dozens of semi-trucks, set up the stage, wired the lights and sound system, and someone tuned the guitars, too.

It would NOT have been much of a show, if Sir Paul walked out on the grass with only an acoustic guitar. ... Well, 10 or 20 may have enjoyed it.

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Anyone who has hosted a party knows what I'm talking about.

There is a lot more to it than simply opening the door to welcome guests.

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Another example:

My friend and colleague, David, who visited in September, was called to a church in transition. He was aware of the situation before he became their pastor, and he realized his organizational skills would be appropriate for them.

He's not charismatic, and he can sometimes have a caustic edge when he's trying to get people to change. Even so, he did a lot of fine foundational work at that church. His term lasted only 4 years, and it didn't appear as if much had changed within the church.

I recall joking with him, a couple years after he'd moved on.

I asked, "I noticed that your former church is really doing well.

In fact, it's REALLY doing well, and they sure do admire their pastor."

He chuckled, because he knew what I was observing, and he added, "It's too bad people don't see how the seeds were planted. They tend to only notice the fruit and the one who bring it in."

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In the Matthew text, John the Baptist was way out of site. He was locked away in prison.

It's not surprising that he was wondering if his life / his preparation work was in vain. He'd laid the groundwork for the Messiah, and he wanted to know if it was bearing fruit.

From prison, he asked his friends to go to Jesus to get confirmation about Jesus -- if he really and truly is the Messiah.

I think John already knew. After all, he had met Jesus.

I think he was in a forgotten place and just needed to be recognized / he needed to be appreciated / to be valued.

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When a Jesus was asked by John's friends, Jesus responded with grace, love AND great appreciation.

Jesus said, "You go tell John all that you've heard and seen. The world is changing for those who believe. People are seeing who could NOT see before.

You Tell John that YES I am the ONE / the Messiah.

His life was NOT in vain. He prepared the ground, and I'm eternally grateful."

After they left, Jesus didn't simply go back to what he was doing.

He told everyone about how wonderful and important John was.

He poured out accolades for John, and declared, "NO ONE born from a woman has arisen greater than John the Baptist."

That is the ultimate compliment.

Jesus saw what John had done. He knew, and he was openly, and exuberantly grateful.

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John and what John did, although frustrating and uncomfortable work, it was essential. He laid the foundation for Jesus.

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So, being a follower of Christ includes seeing and thanking those who work to prepare the way / those who plant seeds / those who make ready.

Realize / see the important work that teachers are doing, and only a few of them will ever witness the fruits of their labour.

Thank them.

Look around, and consider who prepared this sanctuary, who takes out the garbage, who shovels the snow and who pays the bills.

Tell them thanks!

Look / take notice of what happens behind the scenes.

Such as, who buys the coffee that we enjoy so much, and who makes it?

Share your appreciation.

Find out who is on each committee, because much of the committee work goes unnoticed.  
Try to see who is laying the foundation, and also notice who is pushing for change..... because the ground needs to be turned and prepared before things grow.  
Although, change isn't comfortable, thank them anyways.

And don't limit your inspection to the church. Look around at home and at work. Try to see who is making the preparations, and thank them.

In addition, children and youth, your holiday season doesn't "just happen". Your parent have toiled and laboured to make Christmas festive and enjoyable.

Be sure to tell them thanks for the Christmas tree, the goodies and so forth.

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When we begin to see the foundation and all the effort required for preparation, then we will come to understand "transformation."

Transformation is the theme for Advent three, and transformation is NOT an accident.

John was born before Jesus, remember that.

Preparation and repentance comes first.

The wilderness flowing with water and blossoming, is not by chance, nor is because God snapped God's finger.

The blind seeing isn't a quirk of nature.

Being filled with God's Spirit, living without fear and sensing true joy does NOT just float our way,..... and merely praying for them is NOT enough.

Remember verses 3 and 4?

Preparation is required / a foundation is needed.

When we do justice, help the weak and openly proclaim God in all things, then..... then... we'll see / Then we will discover that We are walking **with** God.

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