

## WEEK 3: THE CANDLE OF *Joy*

In the following artwork by Mike Moyers, we see the feet of Jesus exiting the waters following his Baptism. The painting reveals a blurred reflection of his silhouette, but the central focus of the painting is on Jesus's feet. When I first saw this piece, I was intrigued that the artist chose to focus on this. So many traditional pieces of art typically show a dove descending from heaven or John himself lifting Jesus out of the waters of Baptism.

This piece of art invites the viewer to contemplate the magnitude of the call following this moment.

In our scripture reading today we read John the Baptist's own reflection on his ministry and that of the coming Messiah.

John 1:6-8, 19-28:

1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

1:7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

1:8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

1:19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

1:20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

1:21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No."

1:22 Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

1:23 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.

1:24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

1:25 They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

1:26 John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know,

1:27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."

1:28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

John the Baptist knew his one and only call was to prepare God's people for the coming Messiah. He chose a life of obscurity, living in the wilderness in isolation. He survived off the land and lived in utter simplicity. What drew people to this man? He didn't draw them with riches, power and great earthly authority. In the eyes of common man, he seemed nothing more than a zealous hermit; and yet people were drawn to hear him teach and to be baptized by him. What did he offer that led people to come into the wilderness to seek this baptism of repentance? We can easily gloss over this passage, not really putting into perspective that a sovereign spiritual revival was taking place among God's people.

As we prepare our hearts to enter this Christmas season, in what ways are we in need of spiritual renewal? In this long season of isolation, change and uncertainty, have we faithfully kept our eyes centered on our living hope? Has uncertainty, discouragement and fear robbed us of the joy we have in Christ Jesus?

John understood that repentance was the foundation to prepare God's people to receive the Messiah. As we reflect on God's greatest gift to mankind, perhaps it is time that we also ask God to refresh and renew both our love and passion for him. May we repent of any apathy in this season and ask God to renew our vision and call to bring the Hope of Jesus to a hurting and broken world.

Just as John the Baptist had a role in preparing people for the coming Messiah, God has entrusted us with preparing the ground for others to receive Christ Jesus. In the very same way that the Spirit of God drew people to the Jordan River to be baptized, we have the privilege of partnering with the Holy Spirit in His divine work of drawing the lost to Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:20 reminds us, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

As we enter this Christmas season let the joy of Christ be evident to those around us. Let us be led by the Spirit of God in intentionality, sharing that Joy to those both here at home and in our greater world.