

Whenever I hear a reference to John the Baptist, my mind races to an image of an almost caveman looking fellow wearing a camel skin cloak. I picture a completely out of control, crazy man with wild hair and an unkept, ridiculously long beard. My mind pictures John on the banks of Jordan river, wildly waving his arms as he is shouting out the need for onlookers to be baptized. Had I been a first century Jew, John's wildman appearance, at least in the way that I imagine it, would have seriously distracted me from any message that he might have tried to convey. And while I don't feel like my impression of John is entirely off-base, through the lens of history, we know that John is ultimately known, not as a crazy person, but as a Baptizer and a Messenger of God. Not just any messenger, but the messenger who would point out the Lamb of God and in essence recruit the first disciples. In the end, John is known, not for how he looks or even for what he says, but instead for what he does.

Such is the case in our modern world still today. No matter what he does, good or bad, Micheal Jordan will always be known first for his basketball accomplishments. Warren Buffett will always be the Oracle of Omaha based on his successful investment strategies and Bill Gates' wikipedia page will always recognize him as the genius founder of Microsoft in its very first sentence and I suppose Travis and Taylor will always be the power couple of 2023. History has gone so far as to label notable characters, based on their accomplishments as: "the Great" or the "Conquerer" or the "Lion Hearted" or even "The Horrible." For that matter, the villains of history will always be known as somehow deranged and even evil. Sr. Helen Perjean, in her prison ministry work, has accurately observed that death row inmates will be forever remembered for the worst moments of their lives, regardless of any good that they did before or after they committed their crimes.

Right now, you're probably anticipating that my message today will have something to do with reminding us that it is our actions, as Christians, that will ultimately define how we will be remembered. And while that certainly is true, on this second Sunday of Advent, I prefer that we reflect on how history has remembered one man in particular.

Just as Mark's gospel reminds us that John is not only a locust eater, but that he is "the Baptizer" and messenger of God, the very first line of his Gospel declares Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God. In the very first line, his opening thought, Mark leaves no uncertainty regarding the identity and importance of Jesus. He declares his written message as the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. His depiction of Jesus is not hyperbole or the result of some marketing campaign. Through his actions and teaching, Jesus is to be forever remembered, not only as Messiah and Savior, but as God. Not like a God, or one of many Gods, but THE God, in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Nothing is more fundamental to our faith or to our observance of Advent. Because Jesus is God, we anxiously await his second coming and because Jesus is God, we celebrate the occasion of his incarnation that we call Christmas. Because Jesus is God, these remaining days of Advent have to be about more than simply preparing our homes with seasonal decorations, presents and baked goods. Because Jesus is God, over these next few weeks, the spiritual activities of our daily living should be even more prominent than any yuletide tradition that we undertake. Because Jesus is God, we must overcome our spiritual laziness and prepare our hearts to receive him who is THE Christ, the Son of God.