

Tuesday in the Third Week of Advent

December 15, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Zephaniah 3:1–2, 9–13; Psalm 34:1–8; Matthew 21:28–32

Many years ago now, Father Pete Powell remarked in a sermon that the only successful prophet in the Hebrew Scriptures was Jonah. Pete did not neglect to mention that his success came not in Israel or Judah, but with the repentance of the king and people of Nineveh. From a Christian perspective, and with respect to the Hebrew prophets, I think we should include John's name in the list of successful prophets. John's life and preaching brought people to the Jordan River to be washed clean from their sins before Jesus began his public ministry.

In the Gospel according to John, Andrew is one of the Baptist's disciples. The evangelist writes, "John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'"¹ Andrew left John and began to follow Jesus. Jesus was aware that he was being followed. He said to the two, "What do you seek?"² They replied, "Rabbi . . . where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see"³—and they did. In John's gospel, unlike in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Andrew goes to find his brother Simon and brings him to Jesus. The evangelist writes, "Jesus looked at him, and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas' (which means bedrock)"⁴—or massive rock formation. My copy of the standard New Testament Greek-English Dictionary notes that before Jesus, Petros was not a personal name.⁵

Thomas Cranmer put the Song of Zechariah, God's praise given by John's father, the priest Zechariah, when his son was born, after the New

¹ John 1:35–36.

² John 1:

³ John 1:38–39.

⁴ John 1:42.

⁵ *A Greek-English Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (BDAG) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), *s.v.* "Πέτρος," 809–10.

Testament lesson, that is the second lesson, at Morning Prayer. But that's not the only way Western tradition has seen it. Our present Prayer Book made it permissible to use the Song of Zechariah at Morning Prayer in the same way the Song Mary is used at Evening Prayer—between the Old Testament and the New Testament lessons. John and Mary were living links between the Old Covenant and the New.

It's not just John's birth that matters for Christianity. He was the prophet who successfully proclaimed the Christ. John said to his disciples, "I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel . . . And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."⁶

This coming Sunday, the lectionary moves from John to Mary. God chose John to be his prophet; God chose Mary to be the mother of his Son. God chose them so that we would come to know and believe that God truly is our Father.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁶ John 1:29–34.