

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✕ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit. He Prophesied, saying of his son “You, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways.” So Zacharias’ son John was the forerunner, ordained of God, a Prophet of the Old preaching repentance in the desert. And John saw the New, as He pointed from the Jordan’s stony banks to the fulfillment of his preaching and his baptism: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And John touched the New, as He baptized the Messiah to fulfill all righteousness.

As Zacharias prophesied, his Prophet son went before the Lord to prepare His way. He made straight the paths in the desert. And he trod the path to the tomb before his Lord. The forerunner went before the Christ into death. The cost for John’s faithfulness, and the price for Herod’s lust, was John’s head. Blinded by desire, Herod promised the lascivious daughter of his adulterous wife “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.” His sinful craving drove him to make such a horrible promise.

Sin always leads to death. Sin always hurts others. There is no “victimless sin.” Pride, a breaking of the First Commandment, compelled Herod, who had broken the Sixth Commandment, to also break the Fifth. That’s the way sin is. And by his great transgression, Herodias and her daughter were taught that adultery and unchastity and murder are good and to be rewarded. So from one sin were all four made victims.

So it is with your sins. They are never victimless. They hurt you. They hurt those around you. All sin is a breaking of the First Commandment, which is to say that before you sin you must choose a god that condones sinning. And sins multiply. By sinful lying and deceit men attempt to cover up their wrongdoing, which only multiplies the transgression. Sin spreads, like cancer, as retaliation and retribution are mounted in response to trespass. Perceived slights are answered with sharp words, and soon the sins fly in volleys of unbelief.

So, in the end, we are all victims and we are all perpetrators. We are all victims of Adam’s sin, and perpetrators of our own, which are just as bad in God’s eyes. Here we do learn from Herod – the wages of sin are death. Repent. Bear fruits worthy of repentance, for the ax is laid to the root of the trees, and every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John paid a price for his faithfulness and Herod’s sin. In that he was forerunner also. For John preached a Coming One that would pay the price for the sins of the world. It is by the shedding of blood that remission comes. While we learn from John’s preaching, faithfulness and life, John’s death avails you nothing. But the death of the Lamb of God avails much. The Christ followed John in death, but then did what no man before or since could do – He defeated death. He made straight a path that John could not. He opened the way to heaven.

As horrible as beheading is, it is swift. But for the Christ, such a death was too easy. For His faithfulness, and for your sins, He was arrested, tortured and crucified. His agony exceeded that of any other. For while John could cling to Christ as he faced Herod's blade, the Christ was abandoned by God and by men.

In a great Trinitarian Mystery, the beloved Son, pleasing to the Father, was forsaken by the same. On the cross He paid the price for Herod's sin, for Herodias' sin and for her daughter's, for John's sin, and for your sin. It cost His suffering and death and separation from the Father. But for you it avails joy, life, and reconciliation with God.

The Lord of Life overcame death and rose to new life. He is the Forerunner of all those who die in faith. He is the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For now Christ is risen from the dead, and those who are Christ's shall rise at His coming.

John baptized with water. But He preached One who would come after him, One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, One who would bring the forgiveness of sins. And so did the Promised Christ send that Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son, that in your baptism in His Name there is forgiveness and life.

You are washed in the font, your sins are forgiven, and the Spirit that came with tongues of fire now lights upon you. God the Spirit, the Third Person of the One Holy Trinity, works faith in you, faith that trusts in Christ as the Perfect Lamb slain, Whose Blood was shed to take away your sins. And by that faith all the benefits of His death and resurrection are imputed to you.

Through His holy Prophets He promised of old that He would save us from our enemies. So believing in Him are you saved from sin, death and the devil. And the faith given you in Baptism, is hungry. God has provided something better for you. The same Christ that died for you feeds you this day of His Body and His Blood.

By this Holy Sacrament, you have Communion with Christ and all the saints. You are united to the true Head. In His Communion you who eat His Body are made His Body, the Holy Church, that the saints not be made perfect apart from you. And the Blood of the Lamb shed for you avails for your forgiveness and for your eternal life.

Soon He will come again. Then the infant that lept in his mother's womb will leap once more, as he is called forth from the tomb. Then will camel hair and leather be replaced by the gleaming white wedding vestment, locust no longer his food but heavenly sustenance will be his, and will be yours, for eternity.

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