



## Friday's Formation Note by Jamie Hall

Salvation is Created - Chesnokov | National Lutheran Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veDwCqhokOA>

“So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people”

“He” here is John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and cousin of Jesus. We know him as John the Baptist, and he seems to have been a bit of an odd duck. The passage selected here for the third Sunday of Advent, though, may well be a fair paraphrase of his message, and it is worth really thinking about. It does, however, make a bit of a contrast with the Old Testament selections and the selection from Philippians – although the passages are really coherent. They all speak of the coming of the Messiah, of God Himself revealed to us in the Person of Jesus.

What John has to say, though, should be a bit disconcerting and was certainly intended to be (this passage reminds of some preachers I’ve known – including one of my grandfathers!). The passage starts out with “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” and rather goes on from there. The people, being a bit perturbed, ask what they are to do – and his advice is simple enough: treat others fairly. Jesus, later in His ministry, is asked much the same sort of question, and more directly points to the two Great Commandments from Leviticus, and we can see that John’s advice comes directly from the Second: “love thy neighbour as thyself”.

There are many ways to look at that simple phrase – but one, which seems connected to John’s advice here and also very apt to us in 2024, is that we must consider those with whom we interact as we would ourselves. If we approach them as though they will do things we don’t like, and vow to oppose them before we even know what they will do, does that not also say that we approach ourselves that way? And God? If we approach them thinking to respect and accept them, does that not also say that we approach ourselves the way? And God? A thought to ponder.

John then goes on to say, cheerfully, that One is coming whose sandal he is not fit to untie – Jesus, the Son of God, our Lord. And that while he, John, will baptize only with water, the Son of God will baptize with fire and the spirit. And, John goes on to say, His (Jesus’) winnowing fork is in His hand, to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His granary; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire. In our modern world, where our wheat comes in the form of bread or in a bag of flour, this

may not be all that dismaying – but these people were an agrarian society, and they could tell you that when harvesting wheat, while the wheat itself is gathered and cherished, the majority of the harvest is the chaff – and discarded. This is hardly encouraging.

The implication is clear enough: salvation has indeed been created. The implication is also clear enough that it is nothing simple or easy to be achieved. Indeed, the overall implication is that salvation is offered to us in the Person of Jesus – but that we must accept that salvation and be gathered into His granary – and not turn aside to be discarded with the chaff, to burn with unquenchable fire. Indeed, it almost seems as though there is a certain odd aspect to this: while there is nothing one can do to merit being accepted – that offer is unconditional – we can, by our own actions and faults, and failure to repent, reject that offer. The gift is glorious, free, and freeing – and we should, with Paul, rejoice in it.

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