**Prepare the Way of the Lord –** love as defined by John the Baptist!

 A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD.

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be lifted,

and every mountain and hill be made low.

 the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain.

 And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,

and all flesh shall see it together,

for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Is 40.3-5)

When Ash Wednesday meets Valentine Day – who shall I talk about other than John the Baptist: “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”Lk 1:76–79

1. **John the Voice:**  The call to repentance and righteous living- the uncommon message.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, **2**“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” **3**For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’ ” **4**Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5**Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, **6**and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. (Mat 3.1-6) The call to repentance is to pharisees and Romans alike, preparing the hearts for the coming Messiah.

**10**Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Mat 3.10

A counter cultural that this world needs most. The world is missing the blessings of repentance and confession. It was a courageous message that might cost someone his life. and it did.

1. **John the witness:**  He made it to the majestic prologue- as a witness ONLY.

**6**There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7**He came as a **witness**, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. **8**He **was not the light** but **came to bear witness** about the light. Jn 1:5–8… **15**John **bore witness** about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes **after me ranks before me**, because he was before me Jn 1:15

Refuting a major heresy, in John’s gospel, John the Baptist is depicted as John the **witness.**

**19**And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” **20**He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

**26**John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, **27**even he who comes after me, **the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie**.” (Jn 1.19-20,26.27)

Every time Jesus appears in the scene, John takes a step back and points towards him.

**29**The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! **30**This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ (John 1.29,30)

**35**The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, **36**and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (Jn 1.35-36)

In the Evangeletics class, we learnt that witness and martyrdom have the same word root. John the witness had experienced this: For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because he had married her. **18**For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”

**23**And he (King Herod) vowed to her (Salome), “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.” **24**And she went out and said to her mother, “For what should I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist. (Mark6:17,18,23,24)

1. **John the friend:** whose joy is complete – the secret of John’s life.

In the beginning of our Lords ministry, he went to be baptized by John.

**14**John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15**But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16**And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17**and behold, a voice from heaven said, **“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.**” Mt 3:13–17

Since the Baptism of Jesus: **“**And John bore witness: “**I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him**. **34**And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” (Jn 1.32,434)

The real secret is this: John stepped back, in utter humility and love, to lift Jesus up. To honor and witness to Jesus. This was the complete joy for John the Baptist!

**26**And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” **27**John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. **28**You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ **29**The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. **Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. 30He must increase, but I must decrease.**” Jn 3.26-30

John was the friend who prepared the way for Jesus, witnessed about him, and withdrew from the scene knowing that in this, and this alone, is his complete joy. Yet that’s not all. It is Jesus himself, who testified to John:

**“**As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind. **8**What then did you go out to see? .. **.10**This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ **11**Truly, **I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist**. Mt 11:7–11

C.S. Lewis says this: “When I began to investigate this matter, I was shocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson and Thomas Aquinas taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval or (I might say) “appreciation” by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine accolade, “Well done, though good and faithful servant.” - The Weight of glory!

Astoundingly, Jesus himself testifies for John: “There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light” John 5.32-35.

**John was the lamp; Jesus is the light. John baptized with water and Jesus baptizes with fire. John was the friend and Jesus is the groom. Thus John must decrease and Jesus must increase . May we have the boldness to testify to the truth, courage to witness and live the truth, and the heart to love. May our joy become complete- May Jesus increase!**