

Title: THREE VOICES OF WITNESS: ISAIAH, MARY, JOHN THE BAPTIST
(Chatham, NJ; 12/11/11, AM) [E – Topical, Deductive Reasoning]

Theme: Isaiah, Mary, and John the Baptist all witness to the messianic hope and fulfillment of God's promises.

Purpose: To present the message of the biblical witnesses and to allow their voice to influence our witness and life.

Introduction:

1. Soldiers in combat often testify that the main reason they fight is to protect and defend their buddies in their unit.
2. The story of a war thus has a personal side; however, we must not assume there are no larger issues at stake in a war: overthrow totalitarians, seek a just recompense for evils committed, or defend one's own country.
3. The voices of witness in the Bible have the same dimensions, both personal and universal.
4. G. K. Chesterton considered tradition to be very democratic: it allowed voices from the past to influence the present, it gave them a vote.
5. Today we allow several of those voices not only to be heard but heeded.

I. Isaiah Anticipates, Is. 61:1-4, 8-11 (he was a true visionary who raised Israel's consciousness above the personal, the petty and the ordinary)

- A. Jesus takes up the fulfillment of this promise, 1-4
 1. In Luke 4:21 Jesus wears the mantle of this promise
 2. Though his hometown rejected this claim, it signals the fulfillment of long-held promises and hopes of the nation
- B. Larger Issues Involved, 8-11
 1. First, the Lord loves justice, 8
 2. God's justice was expressed in the covenant laws, extolled in the songs of worship, and demanded of Israel by her prophets
 3. Second, the expectation of salvation brought joy to the prophet, 10
 4. Messianic hopes focused on salvation, Psalm 118:24-25
 5. Third, the Lord will bring about righteousness, 11
 6. Today many people insist on social justice, but those same people will not insist that God also demands righteousness, proper moral behavior
- C. Fulfillment of these aspirations
 1. A long way off from the time of Isaiah
 2. By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had neglected some of these weightier matters, Mt. 23:23
 3. Jesus brings them back to the forefront of what characterizes the messianic age

II. Mary Experiences, Luke 1:46-55

- A. Faithfulness to the Covenant, 54-55
 1. Mary sees her experience in the context of God's faithfulness
 2. Similar to Israel when Moses promised them freedom, Exodus 4:30-31
 3. God's promises were deeply rooted in the narrative of salvation
- B. Her experience, Israel's longings
 1. She praises God for blessing her, 46-49, this is her personal experience
 2. Yet her experience is valid only in the context of Israel's narrative of redemption and its description of God

3. First, God exhibits concern for the humble
4. Second, he is full of mercy, 50
5. Third, he scatters the arrogant and brings down the mighty, 51-52
6. Fourth, he exalts the humble, feeds the needy, and sends the rich away, 52-53
7. And it is all about his faithfulness to his covenant and his promises
8. It is about her but not about her alone

III. John Explains, John 1:6-8, 19-28

- A. A man called John, 6-8
 1. John the Apostle explains who he was
 2. Sent from God, 6
 3. Not the light of verse 4, but a witness to the light, 7-8
 4. He witnessed so that people might believe, 7

- B. His own testimony, 19-28 (Who he isn't; who he is; who is coming)
 1. "I am not the Christ," 20
 2. "I am not Elijah," 21 (at least literally)
 3. "I am not the prophet," 21 (Deut. 18:15)
 4. "I am a voice," 23
 5. My baptism is only a precursor to a greater baptism, 26
 6. Someone is coming; I am not worthy to untie his sandals, 27

Conclusion:

1. Isaiah anticipates; Mary experiences; John explains.
2. Their voices point to the incarnation: God became man.
3. The incarnation fulfilled the promises of the covenant and the longings inherent in the whole story of Israel.
4. Their messiah came and fulfilled what all of sinful humanity needed: salvation and forgiveness.
5. That salvation, by the mercy and patience of God, is still available today.