**DO THE MATH**

Based on [St. Matthew 11:2-15](http://www.gnpcb.org/esv/search/?q=matt.+11%3A2-15)

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Advent 3

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The Peace of Christ+ Jesus be with you,

Let me guess, you were one of those kids in math class who didn’t understand why you had to show your work. It’s so annoying to have to write out every formula, carry the four, divide both sides by the multiplier. Long division … who cares? That’s why God gave us calculators.

In the Gospel lesson, John the Baptist is in prison and something doesn’t add up. Jesus is supposed to be the Christ, the messiah, the one who comes to release the captives, and yet here’s John rotting away in Herod’s dungeon. John tells his friends to find Jesus and ask him what’s up. “**Go talk to Jesus and don’t let him evade the question. Ask him straight, are you the messiah or not? And, don’t let him go until you get a simple yes or no.**”

And so they go to Jesus and ask Him: “**Are you the one to come, or should we look for another?**” And Jesus said, “Yes, I am the Messiah. In fact, I am Son of God. In fact—to clear up any confusion—I am God.” And then Jesus wrote out specific instructions telling his people for all generations what to do and what not to do. He told them how to worship him properly, and who should read the Gospel lesson in church. **He foresaw the divisions between Lutheran churches and—for the sake of unity and of getting along--he wrote down which synod was right (OURS).** He said guitars are okay for worship, but drums go too far. He told them that someday a New Testament Bible will be written, and that he prefers the King James Translation. Then he sent a bunch of angels to free John the Baptist from prison, and to slay Herod for being such a meanie. And his church, throughout the rest of it’s time on earth lived happily ever after, until the last day. Now that’s a story worthy of an Almighty God!

But that’s not the story of our God. Our God lets John die in prison. Jesus doesn’t tell John’s disciples, "**Yes I am the messiah the Christ**"; rather, he says "**Just tell him what you hear and see**." God, in his word, by his prophet Isaiah, made promises about the messiah: **that he would make the lame walk, cleanse lepers, give hearing to the deaf, raise the dead and preach the gospel to the poor.** Jesus says to John's disciples, "Look at God's promises and see whether the things I do are in conformity to them. Does it add up? You figure it out. And if you don't know, I'm not going to tell you...because you need to **do the math**."

Did you ever wonder why Jesus taught in parables and not lectures? Do you ever wonder why he asked more questions than he answered? **It's the same reason your Math teacher had you show your work rather than use a calculator.** A teacher doesn't just want you to give him the answer...as if he doesn't know it already. A teacher wanted you to figure out the answer yourself, because the data in front of you only allows one conclusion. **That's how Rabbi Jesus works**. That's how God works...in algebra, giving us limited information and leaves our minds to pluck in the variables—so that we can balance the equation, and insodoing, gain heartfelt understanding.

Do you realize that Jesus never called himself the messiah or Christ? At least, if he did, the scriptures never record it. What he did do was *ask* his disciples, who do YOU say that I am? And Peter says you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And then what? Does Jesus say, "**I am? Thanks Peter, I've been trying to figure that out for the longest time. I'm glad you were here to clear it up for me**!" No, Jesus doesn't ask questions because he doesn't know the answer; like your algebra teacher he asks questions so that you can draw the conclusion yourself.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in this gospel lesson Mr. Christ has two separate classes...(1) the disciples of John; and (2) then the crowds. And there are 2 things about which he wishes to bring understanding, who he is, and who John is.

Jesus already addressed the messiah question, so next Jesus turns to the crowds to talk to them about John the Baptist. John came dressed in camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey. Many must've thought, "**How can this man be sent from God? A prophet would drive a beemer, no rust and have a tie and creased shirt sleeves. He'd be respectable looking, not a bum. He'd be liked by everybody**." This was people's expectations for a prophet.

And so Jesus says, "get real" "do the math." **What do you expect of a prophet...is he to be a yuppie reed in the political wind? A pampered puppet dressed in soft clothing?** So he says to the crowds, **"**No wonder you're confused about John the Baptist. No wonder you aren't able to balance the equation. You're inserting the wrong variable. You are inserting success, and glory, and praise of men into the equation of salvation, no wonder it doesn't compute for you."

If you knew the OT formula, call it Elijah's Theorem, you'd know that Prophets are never pampered. **Prophets are sent to speak of the kingdom of heaven, and that kingdom is always rejected, and despised in this world**. Those who preach the kingdom of heaven will not find, glory or success or the praise of men, in a sinful world all they can expect to find is a cross. So it is Jesus says, "**The kingdom of heaven, it suffers violence in this world and the violent take it by force. That's why all the prophets of old suffered, that's why John the Baptist is in prison, and that, dear people, is why Jesus will be put to violent suffering and death because He, Jesus of Nazareth, Christ the Lord, is greater than John and all the prophets who came before me, because He is the least in the kingdom of heaven." The last shall be first.**

Dear friends in Christ, do you have trouble interpreting the world around you? Do your friends or family think that Christianity just doesn't add up? Do they think that, "If there is an almighty God, he wouldn't do it that way; if there was a caring God there wouldn't be suffering and death and injustice in the world." The world thinks that way, and i**t's because they believe that a glorious God would bring glory this side of eternity; that success is a variable in *this* side of the equation of salvation.** But it's not. In a sinful world, there needs to be suffering to balance the equation. And so the Son of Man gave his life as a ransom, to balance the equation for eternity.

But Praise God and give thanks. Our God, Yahweh, is a God of Reversal. He’s backwards. The cross of Jesus Christ is a place of scandal, but to the redeemed it is a place of salvation. It is the place where the **long division** between man and God is worked out. It is where God **does the math** and balances the equation.

The prideful own this earth, but God says that it shall belong to the meek. The blind shall see. The lame shall walk. And John the Baptist, though he was imprisoned and beheaded in shame, shall rise again in glory. Those who find sin and suffering in this life shall find favor with God in the resurrection.

In the present age, the deaf hear nothing; but on the Last Day, all ears shall ring with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Now our God looks, weak, but it's only because his glory is hidden for the last day. If you want answers, you need only to listen! He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

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