Do you remember the Christmas Pageant here last year? It started with a few and then grew and grew until just about everyone in church that morning had a part in it? It was a wonderful experience and made for a wonderful picture of our church at worship in a different way. That wonderful image came to mind as I read in “Feasting on the Word” of what a Christmas Pageant based on the gospel of John would look like. It would be very simple to cast and even the props would be easy. Can you picture it? One child would come and stand in front of a curtain, maybe of black velvet. And that child would begin saying, \textit{In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”} (John 1:1,14) And I wonder, especially after last year’s Christmas Pageant, how you would experience that and how you would be feeling or what would you be thinking on your way out of church --- maybe a bit shortchanged?

As a seminary student back in the 70’s I came to really appreciate the gospel of John – The Rev. Dr. Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr. – then, one of the world’s top New Testament scholars, (whom we affectionately knew as Throcky), had a way of making the metaphors in John’s gospel come so alive. I learned so very much about God and Jesus Christ and what it was to be human through simple words like bread, light, life and Word. John’s gospel is very powerful with few words.

Before us today John’s gospel speaks to us about another John – a different John. Like the Christmas Pageant possibility – his story could be told as a single character. In Matthew’s gospel he is John the Baptist, in Luke’s gospel he is John the son of Zechariah, in Mark’s gospel he is John the baptizer. But today, in that fourth gospel, he is just plain John and he is questioned by the religious authorities of his day. From our reading in verses 6-8 we know that he was sent from God and came as a witness to testify to the light so that others might believe. He himself was not the light – but he came to testify to that light.
So those authorities of his day were curious and wanted to know more. They ask him who he is – but his response is only who he is not: *I’m not the Messiah, I’m not Elijah, I’m not the prophet.* But then he does tell them – and he says, *I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord,” as the prophet Isaiah said.*

It really is amazing, isn’t it, how much he is not really answering their questions – yet how very much he is telling them about who he is. During the fall we heard Jesus doing that in all those parables we heard, remember? He didn’t really answer the question he was asked – but he sure did tell them something. He sure did tell them a lot and it was big news as the one to whom he pointed was so much more than his cousin Jesus.

And just plain John pointed to the one who was coming after him. They asked about his actions of baptizing if he was not who he said he was not – and John says he’s not even worthy of untying the thong of the sandal of the one who to follow. Just plain John is pointing forward to the one who comes after him. He bears witness both with his words and his life. He points to Jesus with both his words and his life.

I wonder in this season of Advent, in this season of preparation for Christmas, to what do we point with our words and with the actions of our lives? If one were to look up “Christian” in the dictionary it says “professing belief in Jesus as Christ or following the religion based on his teachings” and “manifesting the qualities of the spirit of Christ.” But John bears witness to Jesus, John points to Jesus. He does not proclaim himself to be *like* Jesus – actually quite different, as Jesus is so much greater. There is a gap there. But he bears witness to him and points to him.

It’s interesting to think of that popular bumper sticker for Christians – WWJD? What would Jesus do?” The answer would be walk on water and restore site to the blind and heal people and cast out demons and even raise the dead. That’s who Jesus is. Perhaps a better question for us would be What would Jesus have us do? We are not him. So what would he have us do?

Some dear friends of mine who live on Cape Cod sent me a very thought provoking article written by a local Lutheran pastor there. They sent it remembering how I have long thought Advent should be observed as Advent and not Christmas. In it he rightly stated how we
do Christmas on cruise control. It really struck home for me when he said each year we take out the same decorations out of the same boxes, and put them up in the same places, buying gifts for the same people – most of which are things they don’t need but “it’s the thought that counts.” But he said are we really thinking? And I wondered – what do we point to in our Advent activities? Then he really hit home when he said: “Is it possible that planting a tree might be a better practice than cutting one? Is it possible that feeding a hungry family might be a better gift than an Xbox. Is it possible that being honest about the present might be more meaningful than annually trying to recreate the past?”(Rev. Carl Evans, “Determining the Mass of Advent” Cape Cod Times 12/3/11)

He really got me thinking – and of course a day later I went out and bought a tree and I’m still fretting over the shopping I haven’t gotten done. But his point is right on. It is so easy to get so caught up in what the world says Christmas is all about that we aren't even mindful of what it really is all about – of what God is doing in the event of that birth.

Just plain John pointed to Jesus with his words and his life. Can we ask ourselves in the Advent season of preparation for Christmas – to what or to Whom is “just plain me” pointing?

Amen.