

There are two ways of viewing the universe. The way of Ptolemy and the way of Galileo. In the way of Ptolemy, everything appears how it seems. The naked eye is the judge of the true nature of things. Ptolemy was a second century Egyptian scientist who among other things, theorized that the sun revolves around the earth. Thus, in a time before telescopes and modern math, if you saw the sun move across the sky, and it didn't feel like the Earth was moving—for example, no breeze like when you ride a horse—then the Earth must be the center of everything. For Ptolemy, what you see is what you get.

For Galileo, the universe was far more amazing and far more fantastic than anyone could have imagined. As you may remember, Galileo was one of the first people to propose that the earth revolved around the sun.

My sermon today is, of course, not about the stars and planets, but how the way we view the universe affects the way we think and act. Our Gospel text brings us to John the Baptist in prison and behind those bars, the way of Ptolemy and the way of Galileo face off in a fight to the death.

Ironically, it's also joy Sunday which is why the pink candle is lit on the Advent wreath. Today we focus on the Advent theme of Joy. Yet how do we find joy in today's world? How does someone like John the Baptist find joy in prison? **TRUE JOY CONSISTS IN TRUSTING THE EARTH REVOLVES AROUND THE SON.**

First, I. Living by sight leads to a false joy. The way of Ptolemy is the way of living by sight. There are people who live the way of Ptolemy even today. I'm not just talking about people who believe the sun revolves around the Earth. Many people live by numbers. If I can measure it, see it through a telescope, or a microscope, then that's real.

There are those who want to take the best from human knowledge: business, marketing, sociology, and psychology, and use these ingredients to cook up the perfect church that will grow by leaps and bounds rather than using God's Word. These tools are helpful, and we can use them to the glory of God, but when we rely on these above God's Word, we will ultimately be disappointed.

From this way of Ptolemy comes the cry, **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”**

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus who baptized Jesus and called many to repentance. John the Baptist called Herod the tetrarch to repentance after he divorced his wife and married his niece. What happens when you speak the truth to power? You get imprisoned.

Now, there's an age-old debate as to whether John the Baptist actually had doubts about Jesus being the Messiah or if he was simply asking as a teaching moment for his disciples. I suppose we truly won't know until we ask John the Baptist ourselves in the resurrection.

But what we can ask is this, put yourself in John's shoes. If you knew the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is coming, and yet you were thrown in prison, do you think *you* would have doubts? The way of Ptolemy where what you see is what you get would look rather joyless in a jail cell. It would look rather hopeless with Herod's wife sharpening the axe to execute you, and we know that John the Baptist would be beheaded at the command of Herodias, Herod's wife.

If everything appeared as is, wouldn't the coming one break John out of prison? Wouldn't the long-awaited Messiah free the Jews from the Romans? Wouldn't the savior drive out the Pharisees and Sadducees with their twisted religion and restore true worship? Maybe John the Baptist would never think those things, but wouldn't you and I?

Walking in the Earth-Centered way of Ptolemy, we too can have our doubts. If Jesus is really the king, why is there so much bloodshed? If the Gospel is really true, why aren't people pounding down our doors to get in here? If faith in Jesus means eternal life, why am I sick and dying?

These numbers and figures kinds of questions and looking at these outward appearances will ultimately disappoint. Ptolemy may have been completely accurate in what his eyes saw, but his eyes led him to the wrong conclusions. Walking by sight will ultimately suck joy out of your life.

This way of thinking would be fine if indeed everything revolved around the Earth. Indeed, this would be good and right if the planets rotated around you, but, in fact, you are not the center of the universe. Rather, II. Faith sees the Son as the Center of all Things.

As mentioned, there is an alternative to the way of Ptolemy, the way of Galileo. The way of Galileo is not one of blind faith. It's not as though an angel from heaven came down to map out the stars for Galileo. Instead, Galileo used a telescope to open his eyes wider than previous generations to what was in the skies all along.

Galileo made his discovery not pointing the telescope earthward but outward to the heavens. A key to his discovery was learning that the planet Venus has phases just like the moon where it will wax and wane, but whereas the moon would stay the same size in the night sky, Venus would get bigger or smaller. If it rotated around the Earth, why would it change size?

The way of Galileo will often study the objects around the mystery to learn more about the mystery itself. If all the objects around the black box are white hot, it could be that the black box contains fire.

So what does Jesus say to John the Baptist's disciples? He points them to His signs. **“And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and**

the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”” Jesus doesn’t just say to John, just believe and stop asking questions. He says the proof is in the pudding, but perhaps not in the ways you’d expect.

The life of Faith is not one of blind faith, but as we follow Christ, we find the universe is far more amazing and far more fantastic than anything we could have imagined. The way of Galileo is a world where things are not always what they seem, but behind each mystery is a blessing in disguise.

Our Lord doesn’t give us a telescope like Galileo used. He gives us His means of grace which deliver to us the gifts of salvation from the cross and the empty tomb.

He gives us His Word which tells us about Himself. We would know nothing about Jesus’ death and resurrection without the Bible proclaiming it to us the story of salvation. As the Word of God enters the mouths of the faithful turning into sound and reverberating in the eardrums of others, that is a means by which the Holy Spirit creates and enlivens faith.

Baptism splashes believers with Jesus, **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”** None of us have been to Calvary, or seen Jesus raised at the open tomb, but Paul tells us, **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”** Baptism takes the cross and open tomb to a believer.

The Lord’s Supper is yet another place Calvary and the Open Tomb come to us. There we partake of Christ’s body and blood to receive what was won for us at Calvary. There’s a reason why almost every Lutheran altar has a cross on it because when you look to Holy Communion, the cross is there too.

The Holy Spirit uses the promises contained in these means to change our outlook on life. In difficult times, it may seem like the Sun is setting, but the way of Galileo says it’s not that the Sun has moved any further, it could be you’ve turned away from Him, or simply He is hiding His face for the night, but the dawn is soon coming.

The way of Galileo says that you are not the center around which everything revolves, the Sun is. And so it is fitting that we as Christians confess Jesus is the one who is to come. He is the long-awaited Messiah who is God in the flesh. He is the Son of God who shines His brightness on all creation by Him alone do we see.

And so it is that as Jesus is kept central through Word and Sacrament, and through our belief in Him, we can look beyond appearances and see the hope waiting for us. John the Baptist did not die in vain, and indeed, he will be raised on the last day. The way of Ptolemy will ultimately disappoint us, but the way of Galileo, or better put, the way of the Galilean will bring us joy, even in prison and persecution. Amen!