

**III ADVENT 2013**  
**SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**1 COR. 4.1 ST. MATT. 11.2**

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Rejoice in the Lord, always; and again I say, Rejoice! The Lord is at hand!

These words from Saint Paul's Letter to the Philippians inspired the 17<sup>th</sup> century English composer, Henry Purcell, to write the Anthem sung by the choir at the Procession with Lessons and Carols for Advent Sunday. The anthem serves as a bridge between the Advent Collect...***Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life...***and the blessing given by the priest. The emphasis in the Collect is on the **now!**

Advent is about paying attention to first things...the messages about Jesus' First Coming...so that we can prepare for the last things and Jesus' Second Coming. The Sunday lessons we hear read at Mass, the hymns we sing, and Purcell's Anthem, reinforce the prophetic messages about Christ's birth and imminent return on the last day...and we need to get ready! So what do we do to get ready for Jesus' birth and his return at the end? Pay attention to the messengers...pay attention to the message!

Five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the Prophet Malachi...whose name means "My Messenger"...told God's people they had allowed their lives and worship of God to become lax and corrupt. They were holding back on their offerings and not giving God what was rightfully his. Malachi told the people to turn away from their bad behavior, because God would send a messenger to prepare his way, and the Lord they were looking for would come suddenly to his Temple and make a new and everlasting covenant with them.

The messenger Malachi was talking about was John the Baptist. John travelled around telling people the Messiah was coming and they should get ready for him. He asked people to turn away from their sins and bad behavior. He asked them to show they were serious about turning their lives around by getting baptized. Later on John would tell people he was only baptizing people with water...someone mightier than he who was coming who would baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit. That someone was Jesus. When you and I were baptized, we were baptized with water and the Holy Spirit and our sins are forgiven.

John's message of repentance got him into trouble. While he was sitting in jail, he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he was the one John had told them about, or if they should look for someone else. Jesus told them to go back to John and tell him what they had witnessed with their own eyes. Jesus quotes the Prophet Isaiah: the blind see, the

lame walk, people with skin diseases are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised again, and the Good News is preached to the poor.

Your parish priests are also messengers. Just before a man is ordained a priest, the bishop instructs him to be ***"a Messenger, Watchman, and Steward of the Lord; to teach, to premonish, to feed and take care of the sheep."*** In the Epistle, Paul tells the priests at Corinth to be faithful in the work they do. He also tells the people to support the work their priests do and not be argumentative or divisive and reminding them they are called to follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd. On the Advent Ember days that occur this week, let us pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood. The Good News about Jesus is a message that still needs to be delivered and heard.

We spend a lot of time during Advent talking about the end times and the four last things...death, judgment, heaven and hell. Philippians and Purcell's anthem talk about the end times but they also caution us to "be careful for nothing"...*"Don't worry about anything"*. When we spend too much time worrying about the how and when of the end times we miss opportunities to ask God for what we need to do his work...**now!** Taking care of first things first...what the Collect teaches us...will help us get ready for the last things. And the Advent message is always one of hope and peace that passes all human understanding.

The Blessing given by the priest at the conclusion of the Procession with Lessons and Carols says very well how we should be living Advent and preparing for Christmas:

***Go forth into the world in peace, be of good courage' hold fast to that which is good; render no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Pay attention to the messengers...pay attention to the message!***

Rejoice in the Lord, always; and again I say, Rejoice! The Lord is at hand.

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