

III ADVENT 2015

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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1 COR. 4.1 ST. MATT. 11.2



Listen! Hear the messenger! Pay attention to the message! Repent! Turn around! Reject sin, darkness and despair! Embrace forgiveness, light and hope!

In the early days of the Church, Advent was a much longer season, about eight weeks. It had more of the penitential overtones we normally associate with Lent...much stricter and more severe than the four-week Advent season we observe today. The common theme in both Advent and Lent...the message we need to hear and respond to...repent!

Repentance is not something we should shy away from. The literal meaning of the word *repentance* is to *turn*...to take a good hard look at our actions...to regret our past wrongs...to make a commitment to personal change...and the resolve to live a more responsible life consistent with God's plan.

The Third Sunday in Advent also shares something in common with the Fourth Sunday in Lent...both are "lighten up" Sundays...rose-colored vestments are worn by the priest...flowers re-appear at the Altar...a brief respite from the penitential character of the two seasons.

Throughout the Advent Season...especially in the Church's Liturgy...we prepare ourselves for the Feast of Christmas and the Second Coming of Christ. The Introit from Paul's letter to the Philippians calls us to action...to be joyful because Jesus is coming soon...not to worry about anything, but in all our prayers to ask God for what we need and always asking him with a thankful heart. The message: turn and come back to God...because he is our hope!

Henry Purcell's anthem *Rejoice in the Lord Alway* (1685) is based on the same passage from Holy Scripture. It is a fervent call to prayer and a fitting conclusion to our Advent Sunday Lessons and Carols Liturgy...which truly is a magical progression that carries us from prophecy to fulfillment of the Old Testament foretelling of the birth of Jesus. Purcell's masterpiece reminds us God's peace passes all human understanding...and yet it fills our hearts and minds with his love.

Five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Malachi...whose name means "my messenger"...told God's people to turn away from their corrupt business practices and disrespect of God's Law. He told them God was going to send another messenger to get them ready for his coming...and the Lord they were looking for would come suddenly to his Temple and make a new and everlasting covenant with them.

Malachi's prophecy came true in the birth and life of John the Baptist. Jesus calls John the messenger Malachi said would come first. John's message: the Messiah is coming...get your lives in order...turn away from sin and turn back toward God. Many people listened to John's message of repentance and responded by turning their lives around. To show they were serious and not just paying lip service to God...they had John baptize them in the river...a sign they were starting fresh and renewed lives.

John's work ultimately got him arrested. While he was sitting in jail, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was really the one they were looking for if they should look for someone else. Jesus told them to go back to John and tell him to go read what Isaiah wrote about the Messiah 800 years earlier...the blind will see again...people who have trouble walking will walk without any trouble...people with skin diseases will be clear of those diseases...deaf people will hear again...the dead will be raised to life again...and the poor will rejoice because they will hear the Good News for themselves.

Malachi and John the Baptist are messengers who bring us Good News...not bad news...we need to listen to what they say...we need to pay attention to what they say...we need to respond to what they say...and we need to take action! Henry Purcell put the Good News to music...he too is a messenger.

Advent is the season of preparation for Christmas. Listen! Hear the messenger! Pay attention to the message! Repent! Turn around! Reject sin, darkness and despair! Embrace forgiveness, light and hope!

Be joyful...Jesus is coming soon!

