

III ADVENT 2019

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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THE COLLECT I COR. 4.1 ST. MATT. 11.2

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Rejoice...Saint Paul tells us...Get ready... Jesus is coming! Again...he tells us again...Rejoice!

Something is visibly different in the church today. The Celebrant wears rose-colored vestments...and flowers...absent from the Altar since Advent commenced two weeks ago, re-appear for this Sunday only.

Advent and Lent are both penitential seasons. The Third Sunday in Advent was the halfway point in a much longer Advent Season that lasted for six weeks. Like the Fourth Sunday in Lent...it offered a brief respite from the rigorous fasting associated with penitence.

The Third Sunday in Advent is sometimes called "Rose Sunday"...although that title more properly belongs to the Fourth Sunday in Lent. The color rose is somewhere between Violet and White. White is the color used during Christmas and Easter...symbolizing times to celebrate with great joy. So it's time to pay attention to our friend Saint Paul's message...he tells us to Rejoice...Jesus is coming!

Today is also called "John the Baptist Sunday". He is the principle character in the Gospel other than Jesus. We call John "the Baptist" because he went around baptizing people with water and asking them to turn away from their sins. The promised Messiah was coming and it was time to get ready to meet him.

John and Jesus were cousins. Saint Luke tells us that John's father was a priest named Zecharias. Zecharias prophesied his son, John, would be called a prophet of the Most High God. He would be the forerunner...he would go ahead of the Lord to prepare his road for him. John's mission was to be a messenger. He would tell people they will be saved by having their sins permanently forgiven. He asked them to show they were serious about turning their lives around by getting baptized.

Five centuries before John, the Prophet Malachi had a message to give to the people. God's people had become lax and corrupt.

Both the priests and the people were cheating God and not giving the portion of their offerings that was rightly due him.

Malachi told the people God would send a messenger to prepare his way, and he would come suddenly to his Temple. The messenger they looked for would come and proclaim a new covenant...a new deal...between God and his people. John the Baptist was the messenger Malachi prophesied about.

But John the Baptist had his doubts. While he was sitting in jail he sent two of his followers to ask Jesus if he was the one they were expecting...or if they should look for someone else.

Jesus sent John's friends back to him and told them to tell John what they had seen for themselves: blind people had their sight restored, deaf people could hear again, people with skin diseases were healed, dead people were brought back to life. John then remembered Isaiah prophesied that all of these things would take place when the Messiah came.

Jesus led a life of complete and unconditional service to others. He fulfilled his mission with his death on the cross. It is because of that humiliating death we can look forward with hope to his second coming and the promise of everlasting life.

Let's enjoy this short break from our Advent discipline as we get ready to celebrate Jesus' First Coming on Christmas Day...when we welcome Jesus to be our King. The Advent Wreath Liturgy teaches us the God chose to reveal himself to us through Jesus not in blazing flashes...but rather with a fragile flame...the fragile flame of his birth in a barn.

The greatest gift we could ever ask for is the one we already have...Jesus. He is the gift that should compel us to listen to what John the Baptist said...turn away from foolish and sinful behavior...walk toward forgiveness and light and life.

We have good reason as Saint Paul tells us to rejoice. Get ready! Jesus is coming!

And again...Paul tells us...let's rejoice!

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