

III Advent 2021

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

The Collect 1 Cor. 4.1 St. Matt. 11.2

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Rejoice! Jesus is coming! Pay attention! Jesus is coming!

In the early days of the Church, Advent was a much longer season...lasting about 6 weeks. Advent had more of the austere penitential tones we usually associate with Lent.

The Third Sunday in Advent is a “time out” period in the Season of Advent. Its Lenten counterpart is the Fourth Sunday in Lent. Both Sundays are “Rose Sundays”. Rose-colored vestments are worn and flowers appear at the High Altar. The Third Advent Wreath Candle is also rose-colored. Rose is a lighter color of violet and symbolizes the relaxation of the disciplines that go along with the penitential seasons.

We also call today Gaudete Sunday...from the Latin word “*Gaudete*” (“*Rejoice*”)...the first word of the Introit at today’s Mass. The Introit is taken from Paul’s Letter to the Philippians in which he writes...“*May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!*”

Today is also called John the Baptist Sunday. John is a major character in the Gospels for the Third and Fourth Sundays in Advent. We call John **THE** Baptist because he went around baptizing people with water and asking them to turn away from their sins. He told the people to pay attention to what he was saying...he had some news to tell.

John’s mission was to be a messenger. He travelled around telling people the Messiah was coming and they should get ready for his arrival. He asked them to show they were serious about turning their lives around by getting baptized with water.

John knew the limits of his baptism...he told people there was someone mightier than he who was coming who would baptize them with water **AND** the Holy Spirit. John’s baptism was good...Jesus’ baptism was better...it accomplished what John’s baptism couldn’t...forgiveness of sin and making it possible for us to enjoy life everlasting in heaven.

John’s work followed in the footsteps of another messenger who lived five centuries earlier...his name was Malachi. We don’t know anything for certain about Malachi...his name simply means “my messenger”. And what a message he had. There was hope for the people...the Lord they were looking for would come suddenly to his Temple. It was time to reject darkness and embrace light. The messenger they longed for would come and proclaim a new covenant. John the Baptist was that messenger.

John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin...but even he had doubts about Jesus’ mission. He sent his own disciples to ask Jesus if he really was the one or should they look for someone else. Jesus sent John’s friends back to him and told them to tell him 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 all these things would happen when the Messiah came.

There are modern-day Malachis working in the Church today. They are the bishops and priests charged with being Messengers, Watchmen, and Stewards of the Lord; to teach; to admonish and to take care of the Sheep. This Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are the Winter Ember Days...days set aside for prayer and fasting for an increase in vocations to the ordained Ministry of the Church. Please pray diligently about this...we need men willing to commit themselves to this work.

There are other Malachis...messengers doing God’s work. They could be strangers we meet while traveling. They could be those people who gave us words of hope and encouragement when we needed to hear them the most.

Let’s ask ourselves...who were the Malachis we have already met? What were their messages? How did they lead us out of darkness and despair and help us embrace the Light of Christ? Did they say...pay attention?

Let’s listen again to Paul’s message. It’s time to rejoice. Jesus is coming soon. And he says again: rejoice!

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