

II CHRISTMAS 2021

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

ISAIAH 61.1-3 ST MATTHEW 2.19-23

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“The Sovereign Lord has filled me with his Spirit”, wrote Isaiah. “He has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor...He has sent me to proclaim that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.”

Isaiah made his proclamation in the latter half of the 8th Century BC. He lived in Jerusalem during a time the southern Kingdom of Judah was being threatened by its neighbor, Assyria.

Assyria was a formidable foe...but Isaiah saw the threat to Judah was not only from Assyria's military might...it was the nation's own sinfulness and disobedience toward God and their lack of trust in him. Isaiah spent his life trying to get people back on the right track.

We're familiar with Isaiah's prophecies. During the Advent liturgies we hear the prophecy about John the Baptist...“A voice of one calling in the wilderness...prepare the way for the Lord...make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

And we hear the prophecy leading us directly to Good Friday...“Surely he took our pain and suffering...he was pierced for our transgressions...he was crushed for our iniquities...the punishment that bought us peace was on him...and by his wounds we are healed.”

Let's imagine for a moment we are there in Jerusalem hearing Isaiah's good news. Here is what he says we can expect when the Lord arrives...

*...He will comfort those of us who mourn
...Joy and gladness will replace our grief
...We will sing songs of praise instead of sorrow
...We will be like trees that the Lord himself has planted
...We will do what is right
...And God will be praised for what he has done.*

What does God want from us? He wants us to trust him to take care of us.

God entrusted our Patron, Saint Joseph, with the care of Saint Mary and the child Jesus. The Scriptures don't record a single word Joseph might have said...they depict him as a man of action. Like the Joseph of the Old Testament...Saint Joseph received his instructions from God in dreams.

In the Gospel, Joseph has a dream in which an Angel tells him to leave Egypt and return to Israel...King Herod was dead and no longer posed a threat to Jesus. Joseph trusted God and with Mary and the still young Jesus, started on the long journey back to Israel.

The Gospel goes on to tell us when Joseph was getting close to Israel, he heard Herod's son, Archelaus, had succeeded his father as King of Judea. Archelaus inherited a mess after his late father had desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. Archelaus' poor performance caused him to be exiled to Vienne, near modern-day Lyon in France.

Joseph was given another set of instructions in a dream. He was told to go north into Galilee...an area with a mixed Jewish and Gentile population. There he made his home in Nazareth. Joseph trusted God and the Angel's messages and took action.

This coming Wednesday, January 6, is the Epiphany, also called the Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Joseph's trust in God and his settling in Nazareth, in Gentile Territory, fulfills prophecies from Malachi and Isaiah...

...People from one end of the world honor me. Everywhere they burn incense to me and offer acceptable sacrifices

...Nations will be drawn to your light, and kings to the dawning of your new day.

Isaiah told God's people a new day was coming that would bring them out of both the political and spiritual darkness threatening them. They had to make the choice to return to him.

We are drawn to the Light of Christ. The Good News...He leads us out of darkness and despair...into light and joy. All he asks of us is to trust him to lead the way!

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