

III Advent 2022
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
I Cor. 4.1-5 St. Matt. 11.2-10



Get ready! Jesus is coming!

John the Baptist is the guest star in the Gospels for the 3rd and 4th Sundays in Advent and the 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany. We also celebrate his birthday on June 24th. The real star in the Gospels, of course, is Jesus.

Both the Gospel for this Sunday and the next present John the Baptist as the Forerunner...the one who came before...although in reverse chronological order. Today we hear what Jesus has to say about John...next Sunday we get to hear what John says about Jesus.

John and Jesus were cousins. John was about six months older than Jesus. They grew up together. We might think John had figured out who Jesus was. This morning's Gospel makes it clear John had his doubts about Jesus.

John was an itinerant preacher who went around preaching repentance, renewal and forgiveness...and the imminent arrival of the Messiah. He asked people to show they were serious about turning their lives around by getting baptized. John had a large following of his own. This made the religious and government officials nervous so they had him arrested.

This morning's Gospel begins with John sitting in jail. He heard Jesus was nearby so he sent some of his own disciples to ask Jesus if he was the One, or should they be looking for someone else.

Jesus tells John's disciples to go back and tell John what they were hearing and seeing for themselves was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: the blind were able to see again; the lame were able to walk again; people with skin diseases were made clean; the deaf could hear again; the dead were brought back to life; and the Good News is being preached to the poor.

When John's disciples left, Jesus spoke to the crowd about John's mission. He was the messenger the prophet Malachi...whose names means "my messenger"...wrote about 450 years earlier. John was the messenger

God would send before the Messiah...to get people ready to receive him.

Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, writes this morning's Gospel cuts off what Jesus says next. Jesus call John the Baptist the greatest living man; but he also says the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than John. John the Baptist never got to see Jesus fulfill his mission...he died first.

Just before a man is ordained a priest, the bishop reads the Exhortation. The priest is told he is to be...*"a Messenger, Watchman, and Steward of the Lord; to teach, and to premonish, to feed and to provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ forever."*

In the Epistle, our friend Saint Paul reminds the clergy of their responsibility to be faithful in being good stewards in preaching and teaching God's word. He also advises the people they need to have the proper attitude toward their priests who serve them faithfully. In Paul's own words...*"Do not pass judgment on anyone before the right time comes. Final judgment must wait until the Lord comes; he will bring to light the dark secrets and expose the hidden purposes of people's minds. And the everyone will receive from God the praise he deserves"*. We need to pay attention to our friend Paul.

The Advent Ember Days occur this Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The Ember Days are four sets of three days set aside...roughly at the Four Seasons...when we are asked to pray for the increase in vocations to the ordained ministry. The Good News message about Jesus is still begin preached and needs to be heard. The clergy of Saint Joseph Parish and throughout the Anglican Catholic Church are following in the footsteps of John the Baptist. Please pray for them and for our parish.

Advent is a time of repentance, renewal and forgiveness. It's a time for us to listen to God's messengers past and present.

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