

# III Advent 2023

## Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

### Father Craig Looney

*1 Cor. 4.1-5 St. Matthew 11.2-10*



Welcome to “Joy Sunday”! Get ready! Jesus is coming!

The Third Sunday in Advent gets its name from the Latin word *Gaudete* (“Rejoice”)...the first word of the Introit of today’s Mass. Advent is a penitential season. The theme of the Advent liturgies is one of preparation and expectation for Christmas and the Second Coming of Jesus.

Today we lighten things up a bit. Flowers decorate the High Altar and rose-colored vestments are used instead of the more somber violet-colored vestments. Today we focus on the joy and gladness that comes with Jesus’ birth and the promise of our Redemption.

The Crèche has also been set up...but it is empty. There are no figures. Mary and Joseph have begun their long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The shepherds are out in the fields taking care of their sheep. The angels are having a dress rehearsal of their song of joy and peace. The scene is incomplete...but not for long. We need to get ready for the magical moment of Jesus birth. And John the Baptist has something to say to us about getting ready.

But first we travel back five hundred years before the birth of Jesus. The prophet Malachi...whose name means “my messenger”...told the people in spite of the fact they had broken the covenant they had with God...he hadn’t broken the covenant he had with them. He would live up to his part and make things right again. He would continue to bless them.

Malachi urged the people to turn away from their corrupt business practices and disrespect of God. He told them God was going to send another messenger to get people 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...a covenant that could never be broken. Malachi’s prophecy came true in the birth and life of John the Baptist.

John was an itinerant preacher who travelled around telling people the Messiah was coming and they should get ready for him. In Mark’s Gospel he is described as wearing a camel’s hair

coat and eating honey and wild locusts. His appearance must have been startling...but people listened to what he said. He told them to repent...turn away from their sins and turn back toward God. He told them to show they were serious about turning their lives around by getting baptized with water. But he also told them as good as his baptism was, someone greater than he would baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit.

John’s message ultimately got him arrested. Even John, who was Jesus’ cousin and likely grew up with him, had his doubts about Jesus. While he was sitting in jail, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if he was really the one they were looking for or should they be looking for someone else. Jesus told John’s disciples to go back and tell what they had heard and seen for themselves what Isaiah had written about the Messiah 800 years earlier: the blind will see again...people who have trouble walking will be cured and 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 were messengers who have something to tell us. We need to take seriously their call to repent...to truly be sorry for our actions that have hurt others or ourselves. Repentance means telling God we are sorry for doing those things we shouldn’t have done and failing to do those things we should have done. It is the first step to experiencing the joy and gladness Malachi and John are talking about.

Our friend, Paul, also has a message for us. He tells us we should live in the Light of Christ. If we live out lives this way...we should not concern ourselves with what other people think about us...we are living our lives as God wants us to. Then when Judgment Day comes...when dark secrets are brought into the light and men’s hidden agenda is made known...we can face God with a clear conscience...and he will give us praise. We should graciously accept kind words from others...but God’s praise is more important.

Let’s look at the empty Crèche again. We know how the story turns out. We know the Crèche will not be empty for long.

It’s time to get ready! Jesus is coming! And that gives us every reason to celebrate...after all...this is “Joy Sunday”!

