

IV Advent 2023  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*Phil 4.4-9 St John 1.19-28*

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*“Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
Born to set thy people free;  
From our fear and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in thee.”*

During our Sunday Discussion Group we have been studying the Advent hymns as “sung prayers”. The Advent hymns reinforce our belief Jesus really is the promised ONE who sets us free.

We heard in last Sunday’s Gospel, Matthew’s account of John the Baptist sending his own followers to ask Jesus if he really was the one they were expecting, or should they be looking for someone else.

A question came up during the Discussion Group if John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin and grew up with him didn’t he know who Jesus really was? John the Baptist had his doubts about his cousin. He was expecting the Messiah to be a military leader like David. John the Baptist’s question was a logical one. It’s the same question we ask...and it gets answered.

In today’s Gospel, we hear John the Evangelist’s account of some priests and Levites who came to John the Baptist and asked him the same question...was he the one they were expecting? John said he wasn’t. They knew Malachi’s prophecy written 500 years earlier Elijah would come first to announce the Messiah’s arrival. John also denies he is Elijah.

The priests and Levites then demanded to know why John the Baptist was going around the country baptizing people with water. John quotes the prophet Isaiah and answers,

- *“I am the voice of someone shouting in the desert: Make a straight path for the Lord to travel!”*

Make a straight path for the Lord to travel...is the Advent message...make a straight path for the Lord to travel...directly into our hearts, minds and souls...make some changes in our lives...take decisive action...embrace light

and life...make a straight path for the Lord to travel...we start by living the Advent message.

John goes on to say even though he is baptizing people with water someone greater than he would soon come on the scene and John says he isn’t good enough to even untie his shoes. John would later call Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We hear those words spoken by the Celebrant at every Mass just before we receive Holy Communion.

How do we live the Advent message? We hear and try to follow our friend Paul’s advice in the Epistle:

- *Show a gentle attitude toward everyone;*
- *Know the Lord is coming soon;*
- *Don’t worry about anything; ask God for what we need;*
- *God’s peace is far beyond our understanding; it keeps our hearts and minds safe in union with Jesus Christ;*
- *Put into practice what we have learned.*

Throughout the Advent Season we have been listening to prophecies and singing hymns about the coming of Jesus and the message is always one of hope. We experience the hope and the peace Paul is talking about by turning away from darkness and walking toward the Light of Christ. We do what John the Baptist asks us to do...make a straight path for Jesus to come into our hearts, minds and souls.

The Advent hymns, like the readings we have heard during the Advent Wreath Liturgy and the Mass tell a story. Our closing hymn today is an urgent prayer asking Jesus not to make us wait any longer:

*“The King shall come when morning dawns  
And light and beauty brings:  
Hail, Christ the Lord! Thy people pray,  
Come quickly, King of kings.”*

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