

III Advent 2024

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

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



Jesus is coming! It's time for us to get ready to welcome him!

The Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent is one of the few in the Prayer Book directly addressed to Jesus. Before his coming, he will send a messenger to get us ready to receive him.

During our Sunday Discussion Group this Advent Season, we have been reading the Book of Malachi. Malachi, whose name means "my messenger", prophesied in the Southern Kingdom of Judah about 500 years before the birth of Jesus. Here is what he has to say...

*...The Lord Almighty answers, "I will send my messenger to prepare the way for me. Then the Lord you are looking for will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger you long for will come and proclaim my covenant. But before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah."*

Malachi wrote at a time the priests and people had become lax and disrespectful in their worship of God. He encourages them to renew their faithfulness and covenant with God. His prophecy Elijah would come before the Lord to get people ready came true in the life and work of John the Baptist.

Saint Luke tells us John's father was a priest named Zechariah. Zechariah didn't believe the Angel Gabriel's good news he and his wife Elizabeth would have a son in their old age. Gabriel told Zechariah because he didn't believe his message, he would be unable to speak until his message came true. When John was born, Zechariah was able to speak again. He praised God and spoke about his son...

*..."You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High God. You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare his road for him, to tell the people they will be saved by having their sins forgiven."*

John's mission was to be a messenger. He told people to turn away from their sins and bad behavior. He asked them to show they were serious about turning their lives around by getting baptized with water.

The modern day Malachi's are the priests who serve in Christ's Church. When a man is about to be ordained a priest, the bishop reads out loud the Exhortation. It is directed at the priest, but everyone needs to hear the role he is taking on with God's help. He is told 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, Paul reminds the priests they are Christ's servants and to always remain faithful in their commission to preach the Good News about Jesus Christ. Everyone should avoid petty squabbles and partisan politics...whether church or secular. They have no place in parish life and can cause people to make harsh and irrational judgments against each other and to lose their faith. Paul tells us God has the final judgment...

*..."He will bring to light the dark secrets and expose the hidden purposes of people's minds. And then everyone will receive from God the praise he deserves."*

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin and his role was to get people ready for the coming of Jesus. But even John had his doubts about Jesus. In the Gospel, we find John is in jail for criticizing Herod Antipas' illicit marriage to his brother's ex-wife. John sent some of his own disciples to Jesus to ask him if he was the one who would come or should they expect someone else. Jesus told John's friends to go back and tell him what they witnessed 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 remembered the prophet Isaiah wrote these words 700 years earlier. We ask the same question of Jesus..."Are you the One or should we expect someone else?" We believe the Gospels tell us he is the One! Malachi and John the Baptist have given us their messages of hope. Father Herb and I pass the same message of hope on to you.

Jesus is coming! He will be here soon! Let's get ready to welcome him!

