

Third Sunday in Advent
Matthew 11:2-15

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Matthew 11:9 “What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.”

Preparation! It's something that's an important part of our lives. Every day we plan and prepare for what lies ahead—we prepare at our jobs, at school, and at home, and with Christmas and the end of the year coming, there is more preparing to be done.

In the Gospel last Sunday, we heard these words from Isaiah preached by John the Baptist: The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.”

We have the prophecy from: **Malachi 3:1** “Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.”

Our Lord Jesus is coming to fulfill his father's will at the appointed time. **Galatians 4:4-5** “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

In the last few weeks in our readings, we have heard that John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. In today's gospel when he was put in prison. John heard about the deeds of Christ, and he wanted to make sure his disciples knew that that he was the real McCoy.

When John's disciples asked Jesus if he was the one, he responded: **“Go and tell John what you have seen: ⁵The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”**

Jesus simply pointed to his works of healing and His proclamation of the gospel to the poor as the fulfillment of Isaiah's messianic prophecies.

Isaiah 61:1-2 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.”

When John's disciples left, Jesus explained to the crowds the importance of John the Baptist, that he was God's messenger to point the way of the coming Christ.

In **John 1:29-30**, John the Baptist confessed: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'"

During Advent, we wait, anticipate and prepare for the coming Messiah, and all the events that go along with Advent and Christmas.

We are reminded in the Epistle reading for today to have patience. **James 5:7-8** "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

John the Baptist was more than an ordinary prophet. He surpassed all other prophets because he was God's chosen messenger who was sent to prepare and make ready for the coming Christ.

"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" What is it that you are you look for during this Advent season? Are you looking for joy and comfort from earthly things? King Solomon tells us that searching for earthly things will never bring us true peace. It is vanity and a striving after the wind.

Repentance is key during Advent. Repent of your false hopes. Repent of your false dreams and false idols. You have sinned by making a false god out of the blessings God has given to you.

The coming one was Jesus; he was God coming in the flesh to take away all your sins. **John 1:29:** "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Isaiah 35:4 "Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.'"

As Christians, Advent means more than just waiting for the birth of Christ. Advent specifically focuses on Christ's coming, but Christ's coming manifests itself among us in three ways — past, present, and future.

The readings during Advent which highlight Christ's coming in the past focus on the Old Testament prophecies of his incarnation at Bethlehem.

The readings, which highlight Christ's coming in the future, focus on his second coming on the Last Day at the end of time.

And the readings that highlight Christ's coming in the present focus on his ministry among us through Word and Sacrament today.

The traditional use of Advent candles (sometimes held in a wreath) originated in eastern Germany even before the Reformation. As this tradition came down to us by the beginning of this century, it involved three purple or blue candles and one pink candle.

The blue candles matched the blue paraments on the altar. The blue which we use remind us of the eternal blessed hope we have in Christ Jesus.

The pink candle was the third candle to be lit on Gaudete Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent. "Gaudete" means "Rejoice!" in Latin.

("Rejoice! ... the Lord is near"). Hence a pink candle was used to signify rejoicing. Some also included a white "Christ candle" in the middle to be lit during the 12 days of Christmas.

Aside from the human traditions, Christ's coming is significant, because this is God's way of coming to rescue us fallen sinners.

Matthew 11:11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

We are God's children through baptism, and we are counted righteous for the sake of Jesus and his death, yet in Christ we too are least in the kingdom of heaven.

In the promise of the Gospel, therefore, **"be patient"** and **"establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand"** Like St. John the Baptist, whatever your own kind of prison or suffering may be, call upon Jesus and receive the strength of His Word from those He sends to you.

"Sometimes life requires the astonishing patience of Job. Like him, we are to rejoice in the midst of affliction, be grounded in repentance under the cross of Christ, and hope relentlessly in His resurrection.

James 5:11 „Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

For as ⁵**the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.** So is the good news of Jesus preached to you also.

He comes and restores the fortunes of Zion, His holy Church, so that “sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (**Is. 35:10**).

The gates of heaven stand open before us because of Christ’s victory over sin, death and the devil. We know that Christ has promised to come again and take us to live with Him in glory.

Our preparation is not only for the things of this world, but also for the last day, as we await in repentance and faith, when Jesus will come to gather all his elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

The Lord is coming! Jesus came and fulfilled God’s promise that a Savior would be born to save us from our sins. Christ has come and brings peace, comfort, and hope to you and all people.

His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

May the Lord fill you with peace and joy today and always. Amen