

**Sermon for Morning Prayer  
The Third Sunday in Advent**

**Lessons:**<sup>1</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the thirty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.<sup>2</sup>

“The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God.

“Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the fifth Chapter of the First Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians.<sup>3</sup>

“... And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

**Text:**

From the First Lesson: “[B]ehold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped....”<sup>4</sup>

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

**Introduction and Theme:**

Today’s Lessons are given over to what we may call *Messianic Prophecies*. That is, in the first Lesson, Isaiah tells the Jews first that God will come to them to save them:

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December 13, 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 35: 1-10 (KJV).

<sup>3</sup> I Thessalonians 5: 12-23 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 35: 4b-6a (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 35: 4b (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 35: 5 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 35: 5a (KJV).

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 146: 7b (MCV).

<sup>9</sup> St. Matthew 9: 27-30 (KJV).

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 35: 5b (KJV).

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 35: 6b (KJV).

<sup>12</sup> St. Mark 7: 32-34 (KJV).

<sup>13</sup> St. Matthew 9: 32-33 (KJV).

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 35: 6a (KJV).

<sup>15</sup> St. John 5: 5-6, 8-9 (KJV).

<sup>16</sup> St. Matthew 15: 30-31 (KJV).

<sup>17</sup> St. Matthew 11: 2-3 (KJV).

<sup>18</sup> St. Matthew 9: 1-8, St. Mark 2: 1-12, St. Luke 5: 17-26.

<sup>19</sup> St. Matthew 8: 1-4, St. Mark 1: 40-45, St. Luke 5: 12-16.

<sup>20</sup> St. Matthew 11: 4-5 (KJV).

<sup>21</sup> St. John 1: 34 (KJV).

<sup>22</sup> St. John 1: 36b (KJV).

<sup>23</sup> St. John 1: 40-42 (KJV).

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the lame walk,<sup>18</sup> the lepers are cleansed,<sup>19</sup> and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”<sup>20</sup>

St. John the Baptist apparently drew the correct conclusion, for St. John the Evangelist records him as recognizing Jesus Christ as the Messiah: “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.”<sup>21</sup> And, again: “Behold the Lamb of God!”<sup>22</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

One of the disciples of John the Baptist took to heart his master’s announcement and, once he knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, could do no other than to turn and become one of Jesus’s Apostles. This decision would have an overwhelming effect on the future of the Church, for we read:

“... One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias [**Meh-SIGH-uss**], which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas [**SEE-fuss**], which is by interpretation, A stone.”<sup>23</sup>

Now, in this season when we await the coming of that Son of God who performed those miraculous healings which are the evidence of His divine power, each of us who reads the accounts of them must ask ourselves one question: Having heard the proofs of Our Lord’s divinity, am I prepared to do as St. Andrew did, not only to turn and follow Him, but to introduce Him to those I know and love?

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“[B]ehold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.”<sup>5</sup>

Then Isaiah tells the Jews that this coming will be accompanied by certain signs, in the form of healings of diseases that, in that day and age, were beyond all known medical skill: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.”<sup>6</sup>

The idea is that, if anyone suffering from these permanent disabilities were to recover, all who learned of that healing would necessarily recognize that all wit and art of man was unavailing in such cases. Therefore, all would know, divine intervention must have taken place for there was no other possible cause of them.

### **Development:**

#### **1. The first of these “Messianic Signs” is the restoration of the blind to sight.**

The First Lesson plainly states that the Lord will come and: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened....”<sup>7</sup> This accords with other references such as the psalm that says: “the LORD giveth sight to the blind.”<sup>8</sup>

In the Gospels, we see this Messianic Prophecy being fulfilled before the eyes of the people, if you will forgive that irresistible figure of speech. As St. Matthew tells us:

“And when Jesus departed hence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come to the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened....”<sup>9</sup>

So, too, must the eyes of the crowd have popped open when it saw this “impossible” event.

**2. The second and third of these “Messianic Signs” are related, at least in the Gospel account: the restoration of the deaf to hearing and of the dumb to speaking.**

After the Messiah restores the blind to sight, the First Lesson tells us that “Then ... the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.”<sup>10</sup> Also, “Then shall ... the tongue of the dumb sing....”<sup>11</sup>

These seemingly impossible healings, too, the Gospel shows us being accomplished by Our Lord:

“And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha [*Eff-FAH-thuh*], that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened and his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.”<sup>12</sup>

And also, “[T]hey brought to him a dumb man, possessed by a devil. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.”<sup>13</sup>

**3. The fourth of these “Messianic Signs” is the restoration of the lame or crippled to free movement.**

The First Lesson tells us: “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart....”<sup>14</sup>

Here again, the Gospel tells us that Our Lord performed this “impossible” task:

“... And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? ... Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked....”<sup>15</sup>

**4. The “Messianic Signs” are infallible evidence of God’s presence and action in this world.**

These miraculous healings were not without effects on others, beyond those who were the ones actually cured. And note, that those others drew from Christ’s actions the correct conclusion, namely that divine powers were at work:

“... And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them; Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.”<sup>16</sup>

When John the Baptist, too, heard reports of these miraculous healings, he recognized that these were signs of the Messiah. He was simply uncertain whether the one performing them was, like himself, another forerunner of that Messiah, or was the long-awaited Messiah himself: “Now when John [the Baptist] heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”<sup>17</sup>

Our Lord responded, inviting John to confirm for himself the Messianic nature of His actions by comparing them with the ancient prophecies: “Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew [**SHOW**] John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and