

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Third Sunday in Advent¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the thirty-fifth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“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:⁴ Here beginneth the second Verse of the eleventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“... Now when John had 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? 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 the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

“And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

Last week, the readings focused our attention on our preparation for the second coming of Christ at the final Judgment. Those readings were a somber warning of the events of the end times. In contrast, this morning’s Gospel focuses on preparing for the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world.

Jesus emphasizes the need to prepare by explaining the ministry of John the Baptist to the people. John, Jesus states, is

preparing the way for Him to come to the people of Israel by preaching the Gospel of forgiveness: *“For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”*

All the centuries of waiting for the coming of Messiah were at an end. All the words of the prophets were about to be fulfilled. To let the people know what was coming, to urge them yet again to prepare, he would send a messenger. That messenger was John.

We are accustomed to thinking of our preparation for the nativity of Jesus Christ as from our human point in time, some two thousand years after the fact. Consider, though, what it must have been like for the people of Israel at the time.

For almost the entire history of the people of Israel, they had been under attack, under foreign domination, or held captive by foreign powers. The children of Israel had wandered time and time again from the ways of God, each time to be called back to covenant life with God.

Repeatedly, the prophets found cause to lambast the people and the leadership of the Jews for their failures in faith and worship. Little wonder, then, that the people wanted a military ruler to rise up, raise a mighty army and throw out the outsiders. That, of course, is not what our Lord had in mind. Jesus came to fight a very different battle—a spiritual war—in which He would take on and defeat the power of evil and the devil.

Our Lord explained this even to the man who would order His Crucifixion, telling Pilate, *“My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.”*⁷

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for Jesus’ coming. He was sent to proclaim to the people of Israel that

Messiah was nigh, and that in order to be reconciled to Him, the people needed to be baptized into the Spirit. As we hear on most Sundays in the Final Gospel of John, “*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him.*”⁸

Just as John was sent to the people in order to prepare them for the coming of Christ, we, reading in the Scriptures about John’s ministry, must likewise prepare ourselves for that same coming. In order to prepare, we consider the gift that the Christ child is to us, and by whom the gift is given. The very Father of all that is has made this gift to us. The gift of His only begotten Son, given to redeem us to Him by the expiation of our sins.

This season, as you consider what gifts you might wish to give to family, friends, or loved ones, stop to remember the gift that the Father has given to all of us in the person of His Son.

You might have wondered why we have a rose colored candle burning in the Advent Wreath today. This Sunday is called “Gaudete Sunday” or “Rejoice Sunday”. The third Sunday in Advent is set aside in this way to pause from our penitential considering as we prepare ourselves and celebrate in rejoicing the miracle that is to come.

The name Gaudete is drawn from the first word in the Introit used this morning: “*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say Rejoice: Let your moderation be known unto all men: the Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known unto God.*”⁹

So let us rejoice in the miracle that is coming. Let us rejoice in the time we have to prepare for the coming of our Lord into the world as one of us, to share our humanity and lives.

As we are instructed in the Collect for this morning, let us every one pray that as our Lord sent John to be His messenger to prepare the way before Him, that we may likewise so prepare and make ready His way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at His second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in His sight.¹⁰

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we thy servants await thy coming to the world to be our Lord and Savior. Help us to suitably and acceptably prepare both ourselves and the world so that You are ever glorified. This we ask through Your most gracious mercy. Amen.

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December 16, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Third Sunday in Advent, 2012.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 35:1-end (KJV).

⁴ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. Matthew 11:2-10 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 11:10 (NIV).

⁷ St. John 18:36 (RSV).

⁸ St. John 6-7 (RSV).

⁹ The Introit from Gaudete Sunday.

¹⁰ From the Collect for the Third Sunday in Advent.

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