



What do we do when we feel God lets us down?

Do you ever wonder why God allows certain things to happen? Do you get angry when good people suffer, or when the wicked seem to benefit from bad behaviour. The existence of suffering in the world is an enormous problem for churchnewsireland@gmail.org

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all of those who put their trust in God and understandably some things make us question our faith.

In Matthew 11 John the Baptist had the same kind of doubts about Jesus. John the Baptist was in a remote prison, King Herod would soon have his head chopped off. Meanwhile Jesus was going around speaking words of comfort and forgiveness to the very 'chaff' whom John thought should be judged and burned up. What was the point of Jesus saying he would release the captives when John was still behind bars?

John the Baptist wanted Jesus to raise an army and take charge, just as we sometimes wish God would intervene and right the world's wrongs. However Jesus never promised to set up a kingdom on this earth which would overcome evil. Indeed Jesus said that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36).

The Kingdom of God will come in all of its fullness, but we have to wait. Those who put their trust in Jesus will not be protected from the evil which is still present in the world. This is obvious from the life Jesus himself lived which was not that of an earthly king, but instead walking the road to crucifixion.

So for now we must wait and trust in the promises of Jesus that he will come again and his kingdom of justice and peace will be established. We know this to be true, because His reign has already started in the hearts of those who know the love of God and the blessing of forgiveness.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

The First Reading - Isaiah 35: 1-10

Today's Gospel refers to this prophecy. Isaiah's poetry speaks of a world transformed when prisoners are freed, the sick healed, the hungry fed, and all nature bursts with life, as God in person comes to save.

The Psalm - Psalm 146: 4-10

A celebration of the God who helps those in need – the poor, the blind, the prisoner, the bent over, the widow, the orphan – and who trips the wicked up.

or

Magnificat - [Luke 1:46b-55](#):

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Mary's song of praise to the God who has chosen her, even though she is lowly, and who helps and sustains the weak and needy, while opposing and bringing down the rich and powerful.

The Second Reading - James 5: 7-10

We know from our Old Testament how the Jews longed for the Lord's coming. And we know Christ has come, Christ will come again. James urges us never to despair or lose faith in this time of waiting.

The Gospel Reading - Matthew 11: 2-11

The friends of John the Baptist had expected their messiah to come with political power, but for them and for us the evidence of Christ's presence is founding our individual lives as he comes constantly to transform us.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%2035:%201-10%0Acw%20Psalm%20146:%204-10%0AJames%205:%207-10%0AMatthew%2011:%202-11

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLE

ADULT: Today - the third Sunday in Advent, we hear from the writer of the Psalm and the prophet Isaiah

CHILD/YOUTH: of a world where even the desert sings, rejoices and blossoms.

ADULT: A world where eyes will see, and ears will hear; where everyone will want to dance and sing for joy. We watch and wait for these signs of the inbreaking of God's kingdom.

CHILD/YOUTH: We wait in hope and peace, and with joy. (Two purple candles are relit)

ADULT: The God in whom we rejoice, prepares our hearts for the coming of the Lord. We light the candle of joy. (The pink candle is lit)
God of grace and truth, may our spirits rejoice in the forthcoming birth of Christ, our Saviour, in whom we are privileged to experience your mercy and see your glory.

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COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

O Lord Jesu Christ,
who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger
to prepare thy way before thee;
Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way,
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at thy second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight,
who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
ever one God, world without end.

Collect Two

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who at your first coming sent your messenger
to prepare your way before you:
Grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries
may likewise so prepare and make ready your way
by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,
that at your second coming to judge the world
we may be found an acceptable people in your sight;
for you are alive and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

Presider or deacon

As we wait with joy for the glory of the Lord, let us offer prayers to God who
opens the
eyes of the blind.

Deacon or other leader

For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For N our bishop and all bishops, for the presbyters, for the deacons and all
who minister
in Christ, and for all
the holy people of God.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

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For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For travellers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for those in prison.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For the dying and the dead.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Come, O Lord, and save us.

Joining our voices with the Blessed Virgin Mary and with all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. To you, O Lord.

Presider

O Key of David, sceptre of the house of Israel, who opens and none can shut, who shuts

and none can open, come and free the captives from prison, who sit in darkness and the

shadow of death. Glory to you for ever.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

P Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

P For those who are hungry, those who don't have access to clean water or adequate shelter, that you would provide them a share from your abundant

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bounty and for those who are unemployed and underemployed, that God would provide them the dignity of honest labor, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the leaders of your church, that with repentant hearts, they may boldly serve your people. For , our Bishop, _____ and _____ our clergy/pastor(s) that they would be strengthened in their service, let us pray to the Lord,

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who are vulnerable and outcasts in this world. For refugees from war and natural disaster, for those who are victims of violence and those imprisoned and persecuted for their faith, that God would grant them protection and uplift them from all harm and danger, let us pray to the Lord,

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who are laid low by illness, those who are afflicted with depression, and those who struggle with addictions, that you would grant them freedom and release from their bondage, and strength for each day, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the grace to receive you as you come to us at this altar, that receiving the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation we may be strengthened for our lives of service, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P In unity with (... and) all your saints, who have died in the faith, we offer our prayers to you, trusting in your mercy, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

C Amen.

POST COMMUNION

Father,
we give you thanks for these heavenly gifts.
Kindle us with the fire of your Spirit
that when Christ comes again
we may shine as lights before his face;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

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PRAYERS

God of mercy and power, whose Son rules over all, grant us so to live in obedience to your holy will, that at his appearing we may be raised to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen *Methodist Worship*

God for whom we wait and watch, you sent your servant John the Baptist to prepare your people for the coming of the Messiah. Inspire the ministers and stewards of your truth to turn our disobedient hearts to you; that, when Christ shall come again in glory to be our judge, we may stand with confidence before him, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. *Methodist Worship*

O Lord Jesus, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. *Common Worship*

God for whom we watch and wait, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son: give us courage to speak the truth, to hunger for justice, and to suffer for the cause of right, with Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. *Common Worship Shorter Collect*

All-powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Pour upon us, O Holy Spirit, your sevenfold gifts: of understanding that we may be enlightened; of counsel that we may follow in your footsteps; of courage that we may face the enemy; of knowledge that we may discern the good; of piety that we may be compassionate; of fear that we may draw back from evil, and of wisdom that we may taste the sweetness of your love. Amen
St Bonaventure, 1217-1274

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, O Promised One: Once again we come to this time of Advent and await your presence. Give us patience to seek the meaning of these busy days. Give us courage to wait in times of pain and trouble. Give us the compassion to wait for one another. Give us the faith to wait for the Messiah when we are threatened by the Herods of this world.

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Give us the hope to wait for the Saviour even when we cannot hear the angels singing. Give us the love that does not wait when it meets Christ in our neighbour . Amen.

O God to those who have hunger give bread. And to us who have bread give the hunger for justice..

Modern prayer from Latin America

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out of the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action

—
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) India.

Lord teach me to forgive with real forgiveness, which forgets even where the hatchet was buried.

God of hope, you call us home from the exile of selfish oppression to the freedom of justice,
the balm of healing,
and the joy of sharing.

Make us strong to join you in your holy work,
as friends of strangers and victims,
companions of those whom others shun,
and as the happiness of those whose hearts are broken.

We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Brothers and sisters,
as we joyfully await the glorious coming of the Christ,
let us pray for the needs of the church, our community, and the world.

God of joy and exultation,
you strengthen what is weak;
you enrich the poor
and give hope to those who live in fear.

Look upon our needs this day.

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Make us grateful for the good news of salvation
and keep us faithful in your service
until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives for ever and ever. Amen.

O God of Isaiah and John the Baptist,
through all such faithful ones
you proclaim the unfolding of future joy
and renewed life.

Strengthen our hearts to believe your advent promise
that one day we will walk in the holy way of Christ,
where sorrow and sighing will be no more
and the journey of God's people will be joy. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Go into this week with
the blessing of God upon you,
the healing of Christ within you
the strength of the Holy Spirit upholding you.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Isaiah 35:1-10

Chapter 35 is Isaiah's prophecy about the day of God's glory wherein there will be rejoicing, gladness, blossoming, and shouts of joy. The people will experience a sense of renewal, as he assures them that their salvation includes being saved from their enemies and restoration. There is no place for fear in God's kingdom. Restoration occurs for those who are in need: the blind, the deaf, the lame and the mute. The people who rejected God's way and suffered the consequences, judgement, and alienation will again be the objects of his unmerited favour. And God provides a highway for them which has two qualities: holiness and joy. The people who walk in this way are described as the redeemed and being in right relationship with God. It is the place where God brings full deliverance to the people. Hence, those who walk upon this highway will be full of joy as they march towards God's kingdom as symbolized by Zion.

- What were the encouragement given to the sinners and needy? How can this be an encouragement to us today?
- Do you consider yourself walking in this highway? Why or why not?

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Psalm 146:4-9

We don't know who wrote this particular psalm and we don't know when it was written. With confidence, the psalmist proclaims that God Almighty is the one who keeps promises forever and who will always respond to the needy by giving justice to the oppressed, food to the hungry, freedom to the prisoners, eyesight to the blind, lifting up the humble, caring for the stranger, sustaining the orphan and widow, and loving the righteous. The psalmist may have experienced or witnessed all of these occurrences and therefore concludes by exclaiming that God will reign forever – from beginning to end.

- The psalmist expressed faith and great joy in praising God through writing this psalm, how do you express yours?
- Do you agree with the testimony of the psalmist? Why?

James 5:7-10

James of Jerusalem was encouraging his oppressed members in this passage to have patience in their sufferings. These were the poor Christians oppressed by the rich. James was encouraging them to patiently wait for the coming of the Lord. He gave two examples how they can do this: First was the story of the farmer who patiently waits for his harvest even though it takes time before having it, and second were the prophets like Job who have given them examples of patience and endurance in suffering. Despite the disasters he faced, and the relentless attack of his friends, Job kept his faith and did not abandon his trust in God. As a result, the Lord finally brought about the restoration of Job's fortune. Therefore, James message to them is to strengthen their hearts, keep the faith, patiently waits for the coming of the Lord and not putting justice in their own hands and not grumbling to their fellow Christians for them not to be judged also.

- The word for suffering probably refers to a broad category which includes all different kinds of suffering. In our society today, what do people currently suffer from? How about you as an individual? What is your own suffering?
- Reflecting from this passage, how do you deal with your own suffering?

Matthew 11:2-11

In today's Gospel, Matthew highlights Jesus' identity as an unexpected Messiah and Jesus as the fulfiller of Isaiah's vision of restoration and Jesus

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as God's wisdom. He was frequently rejected by the Jews, especially the Jewish leaders, because they have their own qualifications of a Messiah that Jesus failed to pass. Even John the Baptist who prepared his coming and who baptized him has his own expectation of him as a Messiah. John was in prison and sent his disciples to Jesus asking him "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" He asked this not to question his Messianic identity but to further explain to him what's going on because he expected the Messiah to come with fire, brimstone, with winnowing fork in hand to exercise judgement as what Isaiah prophesied. Jesus answered it by sending also John's disciple to inform him about his works as a healer, preacher and teacher. Jesus' answer indicates that his messianic identity is characterized by signs that include healing the sick and preaching good news. He was not the kind of Messiah who came to judge them but to have compassion and mercy for them.

- What are your expectations of Jesus? Were your expectations fulfilled?
- Do you agree that Jesus is our Messiah/saviour?
- Who is Jesus Christ to you? State in your own words and in accordance of your own experience.

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

What do we do when God is a disappointment?

In Acts Chapter 16 Paul and Silas are in prison. But not for long! By the super powerful work of the Holy Spirit an earthquake opened the prison doors and they walked free! So - is that what we can expect from God, someone who will always rescue and protect us? A short answer - no.

In the reading from Matthew Chapter 11 today, John the Baptist is in prison. Josephus (Ant.18.5.2)tells us that John was imprisoned at Machaerus, Herod's wilderness palace, East of the Dead Sea. It is from this remote prison that John begins to question within himself who Jesus is. Verse 3: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

We need to understand what was behind this loss of faith which in John had in Jesus. John the Baptist was a good man. He had no time for the wicked and he cared little for his personal safety. He was unafraid to take on the bad guys, even if that meant going head to head with King Herod himself. He would not bow to intimidation, threat or force. John was a special man, Luke's

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Gospel tells us that even before John and Jesus were born, Mary visited her relative Elizabeth, John's mother. Matthew tells us that when John preached, Jesus presented himself to John for baptism, and that after the baptism, the heavens opened, the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (3:17). But after the baptism of Jesus, John must have been devastated. He had called people to repent telling them that imminent judgement was at hand. "Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees." He saw bad people and believed that God was about to burn them with "unquenchable fire." This is good old traditional fire-and-brimstone stuff. But, instead of God swinging the axe, John finds himself locked up in prison. Surely if Jesus was the Messiah, then why was John behind bars? Ultimately John would be beheaded by Herod, did that mean that Jesus was a complete and utter failure? John wanted and expected a God of fire and brimstone and what he got was Jesus, who preached full and endless forgiveness to the very "chaff" John expected to see burned. Jesus had spectacularly failed to live up to expectations. Instead of calling down fire and brimstone, Jesus had been all too forgiving. He pronounced blessings on the poor in spirit, the meek, and peacemakers (5:1-11). He called his disciples to love their enemies (5:42-48). He warned disciples not to judge others (7:1-5). Jesus was more interested in healing than using that axe.

People like John wanted a powerful leader, a Messiah, who would restore the image of Israel. Jesus did show anger at some things, like hypocrisy. But his ministry was much more to be characterised by binding up the weak. Bringing the poor good news sounds quite dull compared to axe swinging justice, but Jesus was convinced, it was the poor, the oppressed, the broken-hearted, who really mattered to Jesus. Captives and prisoners were important but not necessarily the ones behind physical iron bars.

There are powerful lessons for us to learn today. **The first and most obvious truth is** that we can be really sincere in serving God and still get our heads chopped off. Loyal service and faithfulness to God does not make us immune from wickedness in the world. Yes, the Kingdom of Jesus is with us, but we still live in a very nasty world where dreadful things happen.

This brings us to the second truth. We can feel really badly let down by God when we come face to face with the reality of suffering and death. John the Baptist had to try and understand this paradox, the existence of a Saviour God and yet the ongoing presence of evil.

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John wanted Jesus to explain why he had not done something to stop the rot. Today we might ask the same kind of question, if God exists then why does he allow good people to suffer? Jesus tells John that his power has a different way of working. The response of Jesus is to draw attention to the characteristics of his ministry "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."

The ministry of Jesus is less about judgement and more about forgiveness. The implication is clear, if we put our trust in Jesus hoping for someone who will make bad things go away, we are sure to have our hopes dashed. Jesus is the leader who ended up on the cross. This might have implications for our prayers. *Charles Royden*

LECTIONARY NOTES 3

Readings: Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:4-9; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

The passage from Isaiah is thought to have been written about the time of the Exile, and what the prophet is promising to his audience is vindication with a difference. The people have suffered much, and God promises to make their future glorious. In a sense, this is recompense for all that they have had to endure and put up with; but it goes far beyond that. The image which has been set in front of the people is one of the absence of fear for the frightened, one of sight returned for the blind, one of hearing restored for the deaf, and one of agility regained for the disabled. The prophet goes on to speak about the way back through the desert after liberation from Babylon, and then of peace, security and unity with all the created order, when God returns with his people to the land which he had originally promised to them.

Psalm 146 celebrates God, who is both the Creator and the Saviour of all. There is no distinction in the work of God: he both brings into being and he puts things right. This idea is found in the Magnificat, where the theme has been developed much further. The Magnificat also has a lot in common with the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, although Mary seemed to be able to take Hannah's sentiments further. Whereas Hannah was content simply to note that God makes some people poor and other people wealthy, it is Mary who began to develop the idea of human redemption within the context of connections and mutuality; it is the poor who are raised in dignity as the greatness of the rich is put into perspective. This idea was also developed in the reading from the Epistle of James who urged patience for those who are

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poor, for the coming of the Lord will put to right all the grievances and injustices of life.

We should not be surprised that John the Baptist doubted whether Jesus was 'the one who was to come'. According to the Gospel accounts, John had announced that Jesus was the one whom his disciples should follow, but the Kingdom of God had not yet dawned. John was in prison for having offended an unjust king and, as we know, his cause was to end in his death. So John wondered whether he had got it right, 'Are you the one, or should we look for someone else?'

Jesus, the master teacher, never the dogmatist, did not answer the questions of John's disciples directly, but invited them to look at what was going on. What they saw was precisely what the prophets had said would happen, and what the writers of the Psalms had sung: 'the blind received their sight, the lame walked again, the lepers were healed, the deaf could hear again, those who had died were brought back to life, and the poor had the Good News brought to them. All these happenings had occurred in the previous chapters of Matthew's Gospel. Thus Jesus challenged John's messengers, and thereby John himself, to consider the place of Jesus in the scheme of things: '... blessed is anyone who take's no offence at me.'

We cannot know what John made of all of these events, but his place in the divine scheme of things had already been assured. Because John had fulfilled his calling to be the messenger who 'prepared the way' for God's coming he has to be considered as having a very special place in God's plan. However, there is a further surprise in this passage, because we find it says, '(even) the least in the kingdom is greater than he'. What on earth could Jesus have meant? Could it mean that what is in store for all those who respond to God's invitation to receive the promises of the Kingdom of God, will outdo, outstrip, and outshine anything and everybody which went before. If this so, then our riches are great indeed! *The Reverend Peter Littleford*

A WORD WITH THE CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE

The message for today is about change - about land and people being transformed in some way by God's power. And this is what happens to us also when we let God's power work through us. Sometimes this happens in surprising ways - in ways we least expect. There's a lovely story about three trees being transformed in ways they didn't expect and it was not until their transformation was complete that the power of God was made visible

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through them. Read the story *The Three Trees* by Angela Elwell Hunt. Each of the trees realised their dreams but not as they expected. The time is coming nearer when we will celebrate once more Jesus' birth and that can be, for each of us, the beginning of the realisation of our dreams - maybe, like the trees, not as we may have imagined, but rather, as part of God's dream for us

SERMON OUTLINE

Matt 11:2-15:- I will send my messenger...

Jn Bpt was imprisoned at **Machaerus** on NE coast of the Dead Sea - had denounced Herod for taking Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.. now John faced death...

1. The Request of John:- *sent his disciples to ask him "Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else? What prompted such a question? Doubt about Jesus? Impatience that his Messianic Mission seemed slow to gather momentum? Was he simply seeking confirmation about his own status? Had John the Messenger got it wrong? Was Jesus truly the Messiah? had time to think/ponder..*

2. The Response of Jesus:- *Go back & report to John what you see & hear... tell him all that has been happening*

a) Look! *the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised...*

b) Listen! *the Good News is preached to the poor..*

All these are signs of the King/Kingdom... **cf Isaiah 35:5/6** *Then will the eyes of the blind be opened & the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer & the mute tongue shout for joy. All came true in Jesus, Messiah.*

3. The Respect for John:- *focuses attention on the ministry of John... What did you go out into the desert to see? What was the big attraction for you all?*

a) shaken reed? *a reed swayed by the wind? wavering?*

b) soft raiment? *dressed in fine clothes? easy life?*

...not **a man in soft raiment** but the **Messenger of the Sovereign**

Redeemer! **Mal 3.1:-** *behold I send my messenger who shall prepare thy way before thee - John the Baptist!*

Norman Porteous

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SERMON

[RCL]: Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:4-9 or Canticle 15 [or Canticle 3]; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

We are well into the third week of the Advent season. Advent is a season of waiting, expectation, and preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

But who is this Messiah? Do we have any preconceived idea how we would like this Messiah to be?

John the Baptist seems to have certain ideas.

In today's Gospel, after hearing what Jesus did, John sends his question to Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

It seems John may have doubts about the identity of Jesus.

But in the Gospel of Luke, we know that John the Baptist jumped for joy in Elizabeth's womb before both he and Jesus were born when the two mothers met. (Luke 1:41) In last week's Gospel, John introduces Jesus as, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matt 3:11)

John the Baptist knows perfectly well who Jesus is. So, why is he questioning?

Well, remember, John is in prison! Has his imprisonment has caused him to doubt Jesus?

The Messiah is not saving John from prison, and the one who is supposed to take away the sin from the world is not taking away the sin away from Herod. Would you blame John the Baptist or anybody to doubt in such situation?

After hearing the question, as usual, Jesus does not answer directly but tells John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." (Matthew 11:4-6)

We see that the doubt of John the Baptist gets his disciples to be mindful of what Jesus does. The doubt of John the Baptist is pointing people to pay attention to see and hear Jesus.

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Uncertain, scary, and helpless times can shake one up and cause doubts in one's faith. Today's Gospel is a good reflection of our spiritual journey. We can be like John the Baptist. When we are moved by the Holy Spirit, we vow to follow God. It is very clear and true. Or when we receive blessings, we are sure Jesus is our Savior.

When we face adversity and disasters, we question if Jesus really is the Savior. We question why bad things happen, why God is not there for us, and doubt even if God really exists. We tend to think God only exists when we are in good times. That is our preconceived idea of our Savior and why we are in doubt when things do not go our way. We are wrapped up in our own world and cannot hear or see God's presence.

Nevertheless, being in doubt may get us closer to God. John the Baptist may be in doubt but his questioning points people to question God also. Then people pay attention to hear and see, find God's grace and bring back the good news of Jesus to the doubter.

Doubting is part of our spiritual journey. However, the process may seem unbearable. We need to point each other to hear and see God's grace to keep our faith. Sometimes we do have to wait in uncertain, and anxious moments before the truth comes out.

Advent is a season of waiting, expectation, and preparation for the coming of the Messiah. We are blessed that we know the certainty of the birth of Jesus. Yet, we are still waiting for the second coming of the Messiah. This time of waiting can be anxious and fearful time.

There is chaos in different parts of the world. We have our fair share of chaos causing disappointment, anxiety, fear, and anger in our own country right now. Enough people question the presence of God.

Will we be able to not be distracted by our own self-centeredness, and anxiety or our own pre-conception about God but look for God, and go and tell people what we see and hear about the presence of God?

As Christians, during Advent we are to slow down, reflect, and pray while waiting for the coming of our Lord. We need to reflect on what it means to be followers of Jesus our Lord, and our seeing and hearing of our Lord.

In a sense, we all have experienced what Jesus said:

The blind receive their sight.

The lame walk.

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The lepers are cleansed.

The deaf hear.

The dead are raised.

The poor have good news brought to them.

If we are baptized, aren't haven't we experienced these things?

Through baptism, weren't we once blind and deaf, but now can see and hear God's good news?

Weren't we once crooked but now could stand straight?

Weren't we once uncleaned, but now cleansed by God's Holy Spirit?

Didn't we die to our previous life and now live a new life?

Didn't we, the once poor in spirit, receive good news?

Truly, if we keep our eyes and ears open, we will hear and see plenty of God's mighty work literally and metaphorically even in bad times. We will be able to go and tell.

It is time for us to share the good news and hope with others especially with those who are in doubt.

Br. Curtis Almquist of Society of Saint John the Evangelist writes in one of his daily meditations that:

"All of that stuff that isn't right yet in us and in those whom we love will be satisfied and healed, but most likely it won't all happen in this life. And in the meantime, sometimes a very mean time, we continue to come back to Jesus to be reminded of his real presence with us, and his provision to meet our immediate and ongoing needs."

We are waiting in uncertainty but we are waiting in hope because of Emmanuel – God's presence with us.

In the last few weeks, we have been reading from the Prophet Isaiah. He has been bringing the good news of Emmanuel to us.

Today Isaiah says:

"They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a

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fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!' ... And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Yes, the Lord shall return.

Traditionally the third week of Advent is joy. When we can see and hear God's presence – Emmanuel, in good times and bad times, and know God is coming again, isn't that joyful? Amen.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

["What's the Plan?"](http://day1.org/2386-whats_the_plan) the Rev. Daniel Matthews, Jr., *Day 1*
http://day1.org/2386-whats_the_plan

Gaudete Sunday

<http://albee2012.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/homily-3rd-sunday-of-advent-year-a.html>

CHILDREN

["Gathering Advent 2013,"](https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/11/17/gathering/) Fran Woodruff, *On The Chancel Steps*
<https://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2013/11/17/gathering/>

[I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy](http://annashosannas.net/Advent-3A.php), Anna Shirey, *Anna's Hosannas*, Children's Lesson for Advent 3A
<http://annashosannas.net/Advent-3A.php>

Worshipping with children

<http://worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-third-sunday-of-advent-december-15.html>

Sermons4Kids

http://www.sermons4kids.com/joy_to_the_world.htm

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- 146* A great and mighty wonder
- 166* Joy to the world, the Lord is come
- 231* My song is love unknown (vv. 1. 2. 4. 7)

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104* O for a thousand tongues to sing
113* There is singing in the desert, there is laughter in the skies
377 You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace

[Joy To The World](#)

[Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee](#)

[O Little Town Of Bethlehem](#)

[Blessed Assurance](#)

[Blessed Be Your Name](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Give Thanks](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Sing Sing Sing](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[You Are](#)

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