

Third Sunday of Advent, Cycle B, Gaudete Sunday - Sunday, December 17, 2023

John testifies he is preparing for the coming of another

First Reading, Isaiah 61:1-2a,10-11

The Lord's salvation will be made known to the poor and the oppressed.

Responsorial Psalm: Luke 1:46-50,53-54

Mary sings praise to God.

Second Reading :1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Paul encourages the Thessalonians to rejoice and pray always.

Versicle before the Gospel (Isaiah 61:1): **Alleluia! The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. Alleluia!**

Gospel Reading: John 1:6-8,19-28

John gives testimony that he is preaching and baptizing in order to prepare for the coming of another.

Background of Today's Gospel

This Sunday's Gospel invites us to continue our reflection on the person and mission of John the Baptist. Today we depart from the Gospel of Mark and read a selection from the Gospel of John.

The Gospel for today combines a brief passage from the prologue to John's Gospel with a report about John the Baptist. As in Mark's Gospel, the Gospel of John contains no birth narrative. Instead, John's Gospel begins with a theological reflection that has come to be called the "prologue." This prologue places the story of Jesus in its cosmological framework. It speaks of Jesus' existence with God since the beginning of time. In John's Gospel, Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the culmination of the Word, the light that is coming into the world's darkness.

Following this prologue, John reports on the ministry of John the Baptist. We learn about the attention that John the Baptist received from the Jewish authorities. Messengers from the Jewish priests, the Levites and the Pharisees question John about his identity and the meaning of the baptisms that he is performing. John's Gospel uses these questions to establish the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist. John the Baptist is not the Messiah, nor is he Elijah or the Prophet. In John's denials, we hear echoes of the kind of messianic expectations that were common in first-century Palestine.

The only affirmative response that John the Baptist gives is when he quotes the prophet Isaiah. Upon answering the next question, John announces that the savior they seek is already among them, but as yet unrecognized. John's response highlights for us an important Advent theme: Jesus has already come into the world as our savior. During Advent, we pray that we will be able to recognize Jesus' presence in our midst. Advent also reminds us that Jesus will come again to fulfill the promise of salvation. We pray that we will continue to be watchful as we anticipate that great day.

The third Sunday of Advent is also called Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete, a Latin word which means "rejoice," is taken from the entrance antiphon for Sunday's Mass. This theme is echoed in today's second reading from the first Letter to the Thessalonians. It is a reminder that Advent is a season of joy because our salvation is already at hand.

Sunday Connection – Loyola Press

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Reflections by Rev. Dada Deji '20 MSCM, Villanova University

The culture of joy is an integral thread in the fabric of our identity in God and a vibrant reality in Jesus. This joy of anticipating the birth of Christ is not an anomaly; rather, it is a gentle reminder to infuse joy and gratitude into every facet of our journey, despite our expectations. This joy, akin to hope, finds its foundation in God's unwavering fidelity, in the absolute assurance of God's promises fulfilled and that God will be with us until the end of the world. With unwavering confidence in God's faithful love, may we joyfully "Shout aloud and sing for joy!" (PS 12:6) as the dawn of His birth approaches. In this season of celebration, let joy and gratitude become an inseparable part of our experience, a radiant reflection of the enduring promises of our loving Creator. —Rev. Dada Deji, '20 MSCM