

In Nomine Jesu

Joyful News!

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever gotten such great news, that you actually couldn't believe it was true? It's so awesome, that you never actually expected it was going to happen. I wonder if that might be how John's disciples were feeling in the events recorded in our Gospel reading in the events recorded in our Gospel reading.

Today is the third Sunday in Advent. Today is unique among the Sundays in Advent in that rather than using the normal purple color for our paraments, we are using the pink or rose color. This is designed to help today's theme of joy to stand out. Today, we take a small break from our focus on repentance in order to celebrate.

This raises the question: What are we celebrating? The obvious answer is of course that we are celebrating the coming of our King and Savior. However, why celebrate now? What has occurred that has sparked the joy in our hearts? Well take a look at our readings. In nearly every one of them, the Word is speaking of the coming of good news. Our Gospel reading in particular helps this to stand out. Today we are celebrating the fact that the messenger has finally reached us. The messenger who was promised to us, the new Elijah. And if he has come, that means that the Messiah is not far behind.

However, we must make sure that we don't become too attached to the messenger. We are not to mistake him as being more important than the One of whom he is speaking about. Our reading begins:

And when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent through his disciples, he said to Him, "Are you the coming One or should we look for another?"¹

¹ Matthew 11:2-3

Maybe you're wondering, "Why would John ask this question?" Well we know from other places in the Gospels that John's disciples have some issues. Mainly the question stems from them not wanting to let John fade away and Jesus come to the foreground. We know that John is fairly convinced of the truth of Jesus coming. We know this not just from his own preaching and preparing the way for Jesus, but also from the fact that he was there at the baptism of Jesus and would have seen the signs that accompanied that.

So John probably wasn't doubting. Although we can imagine that sitting in jail, he might be pondering whether he was right or not. But even if John was doubting, Jesus' answer would help him. It seems more likely though, that John sent his disciples to Jesus to try and help them to understand that Jesus truly was the coming One. John's disciples didn't seem to want to believe that Jesus was truly the Christ. Jesus is going to try and help them with this though.

And Jesus responded saying to them, "Go back and proclaim to John what you see and hear. Blind recover their sight and lame walk, lepers are cleansed and deaf hear, also dead are being raised and poor are being evangelized."²

How does Jesus try and help them to realize why they should believe? What does He use to try and instill in them the joy of God? He uses His works. He points them to the deeds which He is doing, which have never been done like this before.

Let us walk through Jesus works:

1. The blind see. Remember the biblical narrative of the man who Jesus healed who had been blind from birth. [Pause] That man declared that no one had ever healed a man blind from birth before. There was certainly reason enough for joy in that man's mind.

² Matthew 11:4-5

2. The lame walk. Think of the biblical record of the man whose friends lowered him through the roof in order to get him to Jesus. Do you think that those men were lacking in joy?
3. The lepers are cleansed. Remember the Thanksgiving Gospel about the ten lepers who we heard about just a few days ago. At least one of them was filled with joy. He was so joyful that he came back to Jesus rejoicing the entire way in order to thank Him.
4. The deaf hear. Jesus also healed men of this infirmity. Think in particular of the text about the man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. Jesus put His fingers in the man's ears, touched his tongue, commanding it "Ephphatha" or "be opened." We heard that as well in the baptism that we just had here last week. (I'm willing to bet that our new member has an inkling of the joy that that man had.)
5. Also the dead are raised. Do you think that Jairus was joyful on receiving his daughter back into his arms?

The blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf and even the dead, all have physical issues though. Jesus' last deed, on the other hand, is more spiritual than physical. The poor are evangelized. Here Jesus is not speaking of those who are financially poor. He is speaking of those who are spiritually poor. Considering that the Jewish nation had been living for the last 450 years without a prophet like they were used to, let's just say that they were pretty poor.

But then John comes, and points everyone to Jesus who is coming right behind him. Jesus comes and begins to preach this weird thing called the Gospel. I'm not sure if any of you have ever been with someone when the Spirit reveals what the Gospel really means. I had the opportunity to be able to see that one time when I was at camp. I witnessed two young girls grasp the reality that they didn't have to do anything to get to heaven. They understood as the Spirit revealed the

truth that Jesus has already taken care of everything when He died on the cross. It was a blessing, for me as well as them, to see the burden lift up from their shoulders, to be replaced by joy.

Jesus is the reason for our joy on every level. He is the One who accomplished our salvation. He is the One who told us about it in His word. And He is the One who then sent the Spirit to make sure that we could actually believe Him through the Word of God.

However, Jesus also realized that some people would have a hard time receiving this fact. He knew that people didn't like change. So He sent John's disciples away with just a little bit of law stuck on the end of His gospel message.

Also blessed are those who are not scandalized by Me.³

Sometimes it's hard for us Christians to quite grasp how someone can be scandalized by Jesus. I mean sure, the cross is very offensive, but it's still our Salvation. And sure Jesus said some hard things sometimes, but it was always for our good.

We know that everything that Jesus did was done for our benefit. However, the only reason that we know this is because the Holy Spirit revealed it to us through the Word. The unbeliever simply can't believe that Jesus really and truly died for their forgiveness. They are not able to see the reason that a Christian can be joyful.

However, you are not unbelievers. So let's talk about how we as Christians can sometimes get scandalized by Jesus. Can you think of something that Jesus said that might scandalize you? Or maybe something that He did that you avoid bringing up with other people? Maybe you are embarrassed by how direct Jesus speaks sometimes.

³ Matthew 11:6

No matter how scandalized you might be though, through the Spirit we are still able to proclaim that Jesus is our Savior. We also believe, that even if Jesus does some unorthodox things, He did everything in the way that He did them in order to save those who heard Him. Jesus isn't done talking about this issue concerning people being offended though. He continues.

But after they traveled away, Jesus started speaking to the crowds concerning John, "What did you go out into the desert to behold? A reed shaken under strong wind?"⁴

Have you ever met someone like this? The kind of person who puts up a strong front, but when push comes to shove is broken in half. Here Jesus is trying to make a point about those to whom we are drawn. Jesus asks them whether they were drawn to John because they wanted to see a reed who would be broken. This is the kind of person who might initially be a little offensive, but when called out will quickly backtrack. This is not the person that John or Jesus was. They did not back down, and did not break. But Jesus knew that they knew that. So He continues:

But what did you go out to see? A man in soft clothing? Behold those wearing soft clothing are in the houses of the kings.⁵

The word for "but" here tells us that Jesus knew the people hadn't gone out to see that type of man. Now He brings up another type of man. A man in soft clothing. Now the Greek here can actually mean a few things. The first is literally someone who wears soft clothing. The second potential meaning is more like a soft man, perhaps even an effeminate man.

Both meanings are possible. I was told once that typically people don't actually vote for a person based who they think is best for the job. Typically people vote for the person who is going to bother them the least. Obviously they didn't

⁴ Matthew 11:7

⁵ Matthew 11:8

vote for their leaders in the Roman Empire, at least the Jews didn't anyways. But my point is this: we are often drawn to the person who offends us the least.

Here Jesus is accusing the crowds of only going out to John to see if he was a soft man who doesn't really stand for anything. This point is particularly important because that is exactly what many so called Christians here in America are trying to turn Jesus into. They are trying to turn Him into a poster child for whatever cause they happen to be supporting without really caring about what He actually said on the matter.

Perhaps that is the type of man that many want to be in our government. That is not the type of Man who we want fighting the war against the devil, the world and our sinful nature. Jesus was not a soft man. Jesus stared death in the face as it was swallowing Him up. Jesus suffered torture, humiliation, and the wrath of God on a cross, but He never gave in to defeat or despair. He knew that if He gave in, we would be lost. Therefore, He took it all, and did not break. Coming back to what our Lord says about John though, let's continue.

*But why did you go out? To behold a prophet? Certainly I say to you he is exceeding a prophet. This is he concerning whom it was written, 'Behold I myself will send my messenger to your face, who will prepare your way in front of you.'*⁶

Finally we learn who John actually was. He was a prophet. But he wasn't just any prophet. He was the one who is spoken of in our Old Testament reading. He is the one who is heralding the coming of our Lord. Finally we get back to the Gospel, and back to the theme for today.

John was the one who was proclaiming to us that the Savior was nearly there. His message is the reason that we have joy this particular day in the Church year. This season Jesus is nearly here. We are only 10 days away from Christmas

⁶ Matthew 11:9-10

Eve. Are you excited yet? Jesus isn't done though. He has one last thing to say to us today about John.

*Truly I say to you, there is not risen among those born of women greater than John the one who baptizes, but the least in the ruling of the heavens is greater than him.*⁷

Now you should understand that Jesus is not denigrating John here. After all He calls him the greatest of those born of women. What Jesus is doing here, is giving us yet another reason for joy. Because you see, you are no longer born of just a woman. You are born of the Spirit.

You are in the ruling of the heavens. This is the true reason for your joy. And I'm sure you know this, but just to make sure, remember that joy is more than just happy bubbly feelings. Joy is deeper. Happiness comes and goes with your surrounding circumstances, but Joy abides. It's not always being in a good mood. You can be joyful even in the midst of great sorrow, as I'm sure any of you who have had a loved one die in the Faith know. You miss them terribly, and are greatly saddened that they are gone, but your joy remains because you know that they are now with the One who died for them and you.

Here, today, you are free let your joy abide in you. John has proclaimed it. Advent reminds us the Lord is coming, and is nearly here. It is only a little while more and that which we have been looking forward to will occur, once again, for the 2020th time or so. Our Savior, who will die for our sins will finally arrive. Let us rejoice!

Now may the peace which passes understanding, and which comes from the Gospel, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Advent III, 2014
 Psalm 85; Isaiah 40:1-8; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 11:2-11
 December 14th, 2014
 Vicar Christopher M. Craig
Soli Deo Gloria

⁷ Matthew 11:11