

Populus Sion  
St. Matthew 11:2-10  
December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

I Send My Messenger Before Your Face

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

Lord God, heavenly Father, Who didst suffer Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to become man, and to come into the world, that He might destroy the works of the devil, deliver us poor offenders from sin and death, and give us everlasting life: We beseech Thee so to rule and govern our hearts by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may seek no other refuge than His Word, and thus avoid all offense to which, by nature, we are inclined, in order that we may always be found among the faithful followers of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, and by faith in Him obtain eternal salvation, through the same, Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

We sang in the Introit, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again will I say, rejoice." What is there for us to rejoice for in this world? How can we rejoice when the world is so cold and heartless? There is more cause for tears than for mirth and rejoicing. The blind are still blind. The deaf are still deaf. The mute can still not speak. The lame still are unable to walk. The poor are still poor. The dead are still dead. And not only are the physically blind, deaf, mute, lame, poor and dead still this way, but the spiritually blind, deaf, mute, lame, poor and dead also remain spiritually so. There is much grief in the world. There is much grief in our lives. What do we have to rejoice about?

It would seem the same was true in our Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew. Our Gospel reading begins with the words about St. John the Baptist being in prison. He had done nothing in his ministry but go before the face of the Lord + Jesus Christ to prepare his way. He preached repentance toward the remission of sins. He baptized with water all those who came to him to confess their sins and be cleansed. He did it faithfully. He did it boldly. As our Lord + Jesus describes him, he is a man worthy of much respect for the office into which he was born.

He was not a reed shaken by the wind. In other words, he was not easily drawn over into false doctrine brought about by the changing of the times. He did not chase after whatever was popular or pleasing to the people of those times. He preached what He was sent to preach—He preached the Lamb of God Who comes to take away the sins of the world. He did it boldly and faithfully. He was not a milquetoast preacher, who only preached what peoples' itching ears wanted to hear, because he was too meek to preach what the full truth of the Gospel. He went before the face of the Lord to prepare His way. This was more important to him than approval by the scribes and Pharisees. Faithfully preaching the truth was even more important the feelings of King Herod and his false wife, Herodias, who was his brother's wife. Because he preached against this sin of King Herod, and Herodias, he was put into prison. His preaching so offended Herodias that she eventually schemed to have him put to death by beheading.

St. John the Baptist was a prophet, and more than a prophet, as our Lord + Jesus describes him, for went before the Lord + Jesus to prepare His way. Just as the Prophet Malachi proclaimed in the Old Testament reading. He was not dressed in fine raiment or in king's houses. The only place in the king's house where he dwelt was in the king's prison cells. He waited in prison for his eventual death. What reason did he have to "*Gaudete*," to rejoice? What reason do we have to rejoice in this world full of sin, death and the power and influence of the devil? St. John the Baptist sends two his disciples to get an answer. We receive the benefit of his actions, for our Lord + Jesus gives us the answer of why there is cause for rejoicing.

In the prophets of the Old Testament readings the signs of what the Messiah would do when He came are spelled out for all those who in faith would listen and hear. The Messiah would bring healing to this world. He would restore the sight of the blind. He would open the ears of the deaf. He would heal the leper of his disease. The Messiah would give strength to the failing limbs of the lame, so that they could walk. He would raise up the dead, even as our Lord did for Lazarus and Jairus' daughter, and the widow of Nain's son. The Messiah would also preach good news to the poor; He would preach into their ears a message so wonderful that they would forget their poverty and turn in faith to the Lord + Jesus and cling to Him for all comfort and peace.

As our Lord + Jesus pointed out to the two disciples of St. John the Baptist, there was much cause for rejoicing, because those things were being done. They were proof that the Lord + Jesus was indeed "The Coming One." The Lord + Jesus was the Messiah—the Christ—the Anointed of the Lord God to lead His people out of bondage to sin, death and the power of the devil. This was truly a reason for rejoicing. It is a cause for rejoicing whether you are in prison waiting to be beheaded, or whether the griefs and travails of this life seem to be overwhelming you. The Lord + Jesus is the One Who has come into the world to redeem mankind from his sin. He comes to fulfill the Law of God for you; the Law which you break daily and often for you are indeed poor, miserable sinners who need to be sorry for your sins and wish to do better, and believe on and cling to the Lord + Jesus in faith as the only Savior you have from your sorry state. The Lord + Jesus comes to offer up His life as the perfect and innocent sacrifice for the whole world, and especially them that believe on His Name.

The Lord + Jesus has come to do all this for you. He comes to restore your spiritual sight so that you might see Him as Lord. He comes to open your spiritually deaf ears, so that you might hear the good news of His salvation and forgiveness for you. He comes to strengthen your spiritually weak knees and heal you of your spiritual leprosy and cleanse you from all sins. He comes to raise you out of spiritual death into a spiritual life with Him. Just as He will on the Last day raise up you and all believers in Him with a new and glorious body. He gives all of us who are poor in spirit, because we live in this world of sin which hates us and the rest of the Christian Church on Earth so much that it brings us down often, hope. The world leads us into despair, but our Lord + Jesus comes to bring us hope; hope in the salvation that is found in Him alone.

The Lord + Jesus is our reason for rejoicing in this dark, cold and heartless world and life. The Lord + Jesus was the Coming One for St. John the Baptist and his two disciples. He was the One Who has come into the world to defeat sin, death and the devil—those by whom we are tormented day and night—and restore us into His heavenly Kingdom.

But there is even more cause for rejoicing on this day of *Gaudete*; the first of the three rejoicing Sundays in the Church's year. For our Lord's coming to the world—His coming to us—is not just a past event, nor a future reality. He did not just come some 2,000 years ago and leave us alone. Nor do we have to wait how many other years for His return to enjoy the benefits that He came and will come to bring us. Our Lord + Jesus comes us now in this life whenever we gather around Him to hear His Word and receive His blessed Sacraments.

He has come to us today to heal our broken hearts; our hearts weighed down with sin and shame. He has come to preach into our ears hope and comfort. We are indeed poor, miserable sinners in need of God's eternal grace. Our Lord + Jesus comes to us today to forgive us of our sins. He proclaimed our sins were forgiven in the Absolution when the pastor proclaimed that by the virtue of his office as a called and ordained servant of the Word our sins are forgiven. The Lord + Jesus is coming to take away our anxieties this very moment as we hear from the pulpit of our Lord's enduring mercy for us poor, miserable sinners. For He has promised that whenever two or three are gathered in His Name He would be in the midst of them to hear our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by His gracious visitation.

Our Lord + Jesus comes to us today in the Liturgy to remind us that just as St. John the Baptist baptized all who came to him with water, we have been baptized by our Lord + Jesus with water and the Holy Ghost. Our sins have been washed away, and we have our Lord God's Name placed upon us. We are His children. He gives His children the grace and mercy they so desperately need and desire. We, as His children, bear His Name and are promised a share in the inheritance that He desires to give to all of His children who cling to Him in faith; the faith created in us by the Holy Ghost poured upon us in our Holy Baptism.

And, our Lord + Jesus will come to us in His Body and Blood given to us in bread and wine when we approach this altar—the throne of His grace—and kneel and receive Him Who comes to us in mercy and with forgiveness. We will receive from the hand of the pastor our Lord + Jesus Himself—His Body and Blood given and shed for the remission of all our sins. We partake of His Body and Blood that He offered up for our redemption, and we remember His once and for all time sacrifice of Himself on the tree of the holy cross for us poor, miserable sinners living in the cruel, dark and heartless world.

What reason do we have to rejoice in this world so full of sin and shame? What reason did St. John the Baptist or his two disciples have to rejoice as they lived in the same world? There is much over which we can rejoice. For our Lord + Jesus is the Coming One. He is the One for Whose preaching St. John the Baptist prepared the way. He leads us out of sin and death, and this dark world, to an eternal life with Him and all the saints and angels—the whole company of Heaven—who having endured the trials and torments of this life, have put off the old garments of sin, and have put on the righteousness of the Lord + Jesus and now live with Him in Heaven singing the eternal Liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end.

Rejoice, my dear friends, the Lord + Jesus has come to you to bring you grace and mercy. He has come to restore your faith, and forgive you of all your sins. For this reason, we can "rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice" for we have redemption from all of our sins, and our Lord + Jesus has come to us, and will continue to come to us and lead us back to Him by speaking about the eternal peace found in Him, until He removes us from this valley of tears and calls us to our eternal home. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

O Gracious and Merciful Lord Jesus Christ, Who by countless signs and wonders hast shown Thyself to be the true Messiah that was to come, in Whom alone we should trust and not look for another, we give Thee thanks for the true knowledge of Thee from Thy comforting Gospel, and beseech Thee, keep us steadfast in Thy Word, lest, being offended in Thee, we be led by worldly pleasure or the malice of men to depart from Thee, Who art our only Savior and Redeemer, blessed forever. Amen.

#### **The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*