

Gaudete
St. Matthew 11:2-10
December 12th, 2021
St. Bartholomew Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Fort Myers, FL
Pastor Jerald Dulas

When John Had Heard the Works of Christ

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who at 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 Ghost, ever One 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.

How are we to know that the Lord + Jesus is the Christ, the Coming One, the Anointed One of the heavenly Father? The Apostle and Evangelist records for us today that either St. John the Baptist, or his two disciples, (or both) were wondering the same thing. St. John had been placed in prison for his preaching. He preached against the adultery of King Herod, for he had taken his brother's wife. This is what happens sometimes when people speak out against the government, and people in positions of power. It was clear to St. John the Baptist, and his two disciples, that his time of preaching repentance toward the forgiveness of sins was over. He was to prepare the way of the Lord—of the Messiah. For this is what the Lord God promised through the Prophet Malachi. He would send His messenger to prepare the way of the Messiah.

He prepared the way of the Lord by calling people to repentance; to remind them that forgiveness of their sins is not something that they can bring about by their own working and doing. Forgiveness comes from the Lord God. St. John the Baptist baptized those who came to him to confess their sins in the waters of the Jordan River. This baptism was a simple water baptism. It only symbolized the washing away of sins. Our Lord + Jesus would give us a Holy Baptism that would be a washing and regeneration of the Holy Ghost, to wipe away all the stain of sin in us. When St. John the Baptist sat in prison realizing that his time was over, he had to make him and his two disciples sure that this Person + Jesus was indeed the One for Whom he had been preparing the people of Israel.

This preparation of the coming of our Lord is why this season of Advent is often called the season of St. John the Baptist. He prepares the way for us to meet our Lord when He comes to us. He prepared the way of the Lord by preaching the forgiveness of sins. This is the same way that we are prepared for our Lord's coming. Remember that in this season of Advent our Lord + Jesus comes to us in three ways: past, present, and future. He came to us as a Baby Boy born of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Christmas Day. He continues to come to us whenever two or three gather around the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Blessed Sacraments, as the Holy Ghost is gifted to us in order to create and sustain faith and life in us. And our Lord + Jesus will come to us again on the Last Day, as we heard last Sunday, that He will come on the clouds in great glory and power, and will call peoples to Himself so that we might live with Him in Heaven for all eternity. During every Advent

season we are being prepared for our Lord's coming in these three ways.

We, like the people that came to St. John the Baptist by the Jordan River, are prepared to meet our Lord—for our Lord's coming—through the pure preaching of the Word of God. This is where we meet our Lord + Jesus—in His Word and Sacraments; in His means of grace. This is where we are to find proof that our Lord + Jesus is the Coming One sent by the heavenly Father to redeem us from our sins. Wherever the Word and Sacraments are, there is our Lord + Jesus. Wherever the means of grace are, there is the testimony that the Lord + Jesus is the One sent by the heavenly Father to take upon our flesh and fulfill the Law of God and suffer our punishment on the tree of the holy cross, and die in our place, so that He might rise again from the dead, and give eternal life to all those who believe on Him.

When the two disciples of the St. John the Baptist came to the Lord + Jesus and asked Him the question they had been sent to ask, what answer does our Lord + Jesus give? He pointed to His works. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear again, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. These are what the Prophet Isaiah had foretold were to be the works of the Messiah. In other words, our Lord + Jesus points to the fulfillment of the prophecy—the fulfillment of the Word of God—as the proof that He was the Coming One, the Anointed of the heavenly Father to redeem His people.

We have been told that for us our Lord + Jesus is found in preaching of the Word and the Sacraments. As St. Paul wrote in the Epistle, the Servants of Christ, that is, bishops, pastors, and deacons, are stewards of the mysteries of the Lord God. A steward is someone who distributes his master's goods to those in his household and to all those in need. The stewards of the mysteries of the Lord God distribute the gifts that the Lord + Jesus won by His death on the cross to all those who come for the forgiveness of their sins. The mysteries of the Lord God are the Word and the Sacraments which we receive to wash away all stain of sin in us. For the Word preaches into our ears that our Lord + Jesus redeemed us back from sin by His sacrifice on the tree of the holy cross. Holy Baptism washes away our sins and gives us the Holy Ghost, Who creates faith in us. The Sacrament of the Altar gives us forgiveness by giving to us the very Body and Blood of our Lord + Jesus in bread and wine, as we remember our Lord's sacrifice, and receive forgiveness, life and salvation through these means.

How are we to know that the Lord + Jesus is the Messiah—the Coming One? Like St. John the Baptist and his two disciples, our Lord + Jesus points us to His works. He pointed them to the healing of the blind, deaf, lame and lepers. He points us to His means of grace; to the means by which our Lord + Jesus promised we would be able to remain in Him. This is why it is so important to gather together as the Body of Christ—as the Church—and receive from Him these gifts, for they point the way to our Lord + Jesus. This is why our Lord + Jesus continues to send out ministers to us to point us to the way of the Christ.

St. John the Baptist knowing that his time was over, sent his two disciples to now be taught by the Lord + Jesus; to see that in the Lord + Jesus the fulfillment of his preaching of repentance towards the forgiveness of sins was found. True ministers of the Coming One—the Christ—also point us to the works of the Lord + Jesus. This is why this day is called "*Gaudete*," for this is a day of rejoicing. Seeing St. John the Baptist in prison waiting to be beheaded may not seem like a cause for rejoicing, but we rejoice that the works of the Christ reveal to us our Lord + Jesus and the forgiveness found in Him.

This is the first of the three rejoicing Sundays in the Church's year. They all mark the halfway point of their seasons. The other two are in Lent and Easter: Laetare and Jubilate. This is why rose-colored vestments and paraments are used today (and on Laetare) to show that as we reach the halfway point of the season, we pause our penitential sorrow and rejoice briefly as we look for the coming of our Lord + Jesus to us. For our Lord + Jesus has given us the Holy Ghost and His means of

grace to create faith in us, and strengthen our faith in Him as we sojourn in this valley of tears, so that we might learn to cling to Him and Him alone for our salvation. We rejoice that just as He sent His messenger—St. John the Baptist—to go before Him to prepare His way, He also sends to us His servants, who as the stewards of His mysteries give to us abundantly the treasures of His household.

This is why this day historically has been the day when new pastors are ordained in the Office of the Holy Ministry, for like St. John the Baptist, and like St. Paul, and the Prophets Isaiah and Malachi, the new pastor is placed into a stewardship. He is given stewardship of the mysteries of the Lord God, in order that he might point all those who are in the household to the works of the Christ. The spiritually blind, deaf, lame, leprous, and poor are restored through the pure preaching of the Word and right administration of the Blessed Sacraments.

Therefore, my dear friends, rejoice, for the Lord + Jesus is revealed to us through His means of grace. And rejoice that through these means our Lord + Jesus comes to be with us poor, miserable sinners, in order that He might cover our sins with His works. Rejoice, my dear friends, that in less than two weeks we will celebrate with the whole Christian Church on Earth, and in Heaven, the birth of our Lord + Jesus in our flesh on Christmas Day. And let us rejoice, too, that soon our Lord + Jesus will come on the clouds in great glory and might, and take us to our eternal home in Heaven to be with Him and all the saints and angels for all eternity. Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel and speedily deliver us and take us from this prison to our home in Heaven! 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!