

Gaudete
St. Matthew 11:2-10
December 17th, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Behold, I Send My Messenger

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“This is he, of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee.’”

Prayer in Pulpit before 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.

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

My dear friends, the season of Advent is all about our Lord + Jesus coming to us poor, miserable sinners. That is what the word “Advent” means: it means “to come; to draw near.” Our Lord draws near to us in this season. Our Lord comes to us in this season. The Church has observed that our Lord comes to us, His people, in three ways: He came to us in our flesh at His incarnation and in His Nativity; He comes to us in His means of grace, His Blessed Word and Sacraments; and He will come to us again on the Last Day in our flesh and in all of His glory to judge both the quick and the dead, and give eternal life to all those who cling to Him in faith. Therefore, our focus during this Adventtide is our Lord’s coming to us, our Lord’s advent.

This is why St. John the Baptist is the symbol of the advent of our Lord. For He is the herald of the coming of our Lord. He is the one who was promised by the Lord God through the Prophet Malachi to be the forerunner of the coming of the Lord and Savior of mankind. He is the one who goes before the Lord + Jesus to prepare His way. Next Sunday, the last Sunday in Advent, we will hear from St. John the Baptist himself as he proclaims that he is not the Messiah, but the one who prepares the way of the Messiah.

Today we also hear about St. John the Baptist. But this time we hear about Him at the end of his life as he sits in prison for his preaching against the sins of Herod. Soon he will be beheaded, martyred for preparing the way of the Lord + Jesus. For he must decrease, while the Lord + Jesus must increase. There is a connection with these words of St. John the Baptist and the current season in which we find ourselves, for the amount of daylight is decreasing every day as the season of winter approaches. The winter solstice will occur this coming week, just before we celebrate the Nativity of

our Lord + Jesus; just before the Light of the world comes to dispel the darkness from this world by being a beacon of hope and salvation to all those who cling in faith to Him. As the time of St. John the Baptist winds down, the time of the coming of our Lord arrives. He prepares the way of the Lord for us during this Advent season. He prepares the way for us to receive the Light of the world.

Part of his diminishing is preparing his own disciples for the arrival of the Lord + Jesus. During Advent we focus on the Baby Boy that is born to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, Who is laid in a manger and who shepherds adore and of whom angels sing. But today we hear from our Lord + Jesus in the midst of His earthly ministry. In the previous chapter of the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew's Gospel, our Lord + Jesus had chosen and sent out the twelve Apostles. They were now the ones who would go before Him and prepare His way. They would preach and teach, and cast out demons in His Name. They would prepare the way for the Lord as He also performed the works of which the Prophet Isaiah foretold. He would give the blind their sight, and give the lame the ability to walk. He would cleanse the lepers and cause the deaf to hear again. He would raise the dead and preach to the poor that salvation was found in Him alone.

All this happens while St. John the Baptist is in prison. He hears of these events and prepares two of his disciples to receive the Lord + Jesus. He sends them to the Lord to ask if He is the One Who is to come. Our Lord points to the signs and wonders of which the Prophet Isaiah had foretold and which were being accomplished through Him, and of which St. John the Baptist had heard about while in prison. It is clear given the preaching of St. John the Baptist that he did not doubt. The blessed Martin Luther says as much in the excerpt from his sermon on this text found in the bulletin announcements. Someone who had seen the Lord, baptized Him, leaped in the womb for Him, could not have doubts about whether the Lord + Jesus was the One to come.

Even our Lord + Jesus defends the integrity of St. John the Baptist in this Gospel reading for today. It appears that the crowds viewed St. John the Baptist as a great prophet. How could he doubt? How could he send two of his disciples to question the Lord? From the response of our Lord + Jesus it would appear that the crowds were taken aback by this questioning. "Could he have doubted that this Man + Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One of the Lord?" they must have asked. The Lord therefore dispels the fears and doubts of the people by reminding them of who St. John the Baptist is and was.

Who did they go out in the wilderness to see? They did not go out to see someone who was wishy-washy. Of all the Charlie Browns in the world, he was NOT the Charlie Brownest. He was not a reed shaken in the wind. He boldly preached about the coming of the Messiah. He preached to boldly and fearless that he upset both the scribes and Pharisees sent from Jerusalem (of which we will hear about next Sunday), but he also upset King Herod and his adulterous wife, Herodias, who was actually his brother's wife. St. John the Baptist did not fear the power of Herod's crown and rebuked him for his sin.

The people of Israel also did not go out in the wilderness to see someone dressed in soft raiment. Those who are dressed in soft raiments live in kings' palaces, they are not out in the wilderness. Those who cling to fame and popularity would not preach like St. John the Baptist did. For to boldly preach the truth one can expect to receive opposition. Those in soft raiments do not want to give up their positions of respectability. They live to please the world and those of this world who would give them praise. This is not who the people of Israel went out in the wilderness to see. They went to see a prophet. They went to hear the one who was preparing the way of the Anointed One of the Lord God. They went to hear the one who preached the coming of the Messiah; that He was here; He was at the gate; He was standing among them.

St. John the Baptist preached about the Lamb of God which had come into the world to redeem

the world from sin, death, and the power of the devil. They went out in the wilderness to see and hear the one who was sent to go before the coming of the Lord God in our flesh. This one that they went to see and hear could not have doubts about Who the Messiah, the Christ was, for he boldly preached the truth of Who the Lord incarnate was without fear or trembling, without concern about who he offended or upset. He preached the truth of the Lord God not worrying about what it meant for him.

And so, he prepares two more of his disciples (for many of the first disciples of our Lord + Jesus were former disciples of St. John the Baptist). He prepares his disciples by sending them to the Lord + Jesus so that they might hear that the proof that the Lord + Jesus is the Messiah is found in His works.

This is also why we come to the wilderness to hear about our Lord. To hear about our Lord + Jesus preached with all boldness and honesty from ministers who are more concerned about preaching the truth than preaching to please men's ears. We come to the wilderness, to a place where only two or three are gathered together, for we know that we will hear about our Lord in all truth and purity. We know that we will receive the Sacraments according to the Lord's institution. Therefore, we come to hear about our Lord + Jesus from someone who is not a reed in the wind, from someone who is not dressed in soft raiments. We come to hear the minister of the Lord + Jesus, for he points us to the One Who has come in our flesh at His birth, continues to come in His Word and Sacraments, and will come again on the Last Day to take us to our eternal home in heaven.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us rejoice on this day of Gaudete, for St. John the Baptist has prepared the way of the Lord for us. He has proclaimed that the Lord + Jesus has come to redeem mankind from their sins. Our Lord has come to redeem us from our sins. There is no greater cause for rejoicing. For in our Lord + Jesus we have forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. We are freed from the darkness of sin, and have been brought into the glorious light of our Lord + Jesus. He is the Light of the world. May He illumine not only our hearts and minds with faith, but through the pure preaching of the Word of God and the Blessed Sacraments, may He enlighten the whole world with the promise of His grace. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!