

Gaudete
St. Matthew 11:2-10
December 15th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Much More Than a Prophet

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“But wherefore went ye out? to see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. 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, our Lord + Jesus comes to His people in three ways during the Advent season: in a little over two weeks, we will celebrate His first coming. When He came bearing our flesh as a Baby born to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was wrapped up in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger. He came lowly, humbly, meekly, just as we heard in on the First Sunday in Advent when our Lord entered into Jerusalem on an ass and on a colt, the foal of an ass. He came lowly, humbly, and meekly to His people, bearing their flesh to redeem them from sin and death.

Last Sunday we heard about His Second coming on the Last Day, the Day of Judgment. For the unbelieving world there will be much fear and trepidation. But for those who cling to the works and merits of the Christ, our Lord tells us that we should not fear His coming. We should rather look up, and behold that our Redemption has drawn nigh. He will come on that Last Day for His saints as one inviting and consoling those who have washed their robes in the Blood of the Lamb of God. He will come on that Last Day in love and mercy.

Indeed, He comes to His Church every day, whenever two or three people are gathered together in His Name, as we are this day, to bring them the gifts that He won for us upon the tree of the holy cross. He won for us by His suffering and death, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. He imparts these gifts to the Church, to us, by the work of the Holy Ghost through the means of grace. Wherever His Word is taught and preached in its truth and purity, and the Blessed Sacraments are administered according to His institution, there the Lord is coming to us lowly, humbly, and meekly, to show us poor, miserable sinners, love and mercy. This is how our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, comes to

us, His people. He comes to us in love and mercy. This is no more evident than in the Gospel reading for today from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew.

The last two Sundays in Advent feature St. John the Baptist. Next week he will use his finger to point all those who would hear to the Christ Who has come. Today, he sends two of his disciples to ask the Lord + Jesus if He was the One Who was supposed to come. He does not do this for Himself. Our Lord + Jesus even in the Gospel reading tells us that St. John the Baptist was not a reed which is tossed about in the wind. He was a prophet, indeed, much more than a prophet, for all the other prophets foretold of a Christ to come. St. John the Baptist tells us of a Christ Who has already come. He knew the Lord + Jesus was the Christ from His mother's womb, when he leaped for joy when St. Mary, the Mother of the Lord, greeted His mother, Elizabeth. He had, as we shall see next Sunday, pointed out the Lord + Jesus as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, when the Lord came to be baptized by Him in the Jordan River.

Therefore, St. John is not asking for himself, but he sends his disciples who must be doubting whether or not this + Jesus of Nazareth is the coming Messiah. Perhaps they expected the Messiah to act differently than He was. Many people expect a fire and brimstone sort of God to come. A God like in the Old Testament. The Lord God had promised Moses, when he was about to die, that He would send to His people a prophet like unto Moses. What kind of prophet was Moses? He was the prophet that sent ten plagues upon Egypt: turning water into blood, sending locusts, frogs, hail, darkness, and killing the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. Moses was the prophet who had Dathan, and his co-conspirators, and families, swallowed up by the earth. Moses was the prophet who sent serpents into the midst of the camp of the Israelites because of their false idolatry. And, of course, there are other examples where we see the Prophet Moses, acting on the Lord God's behalf, sending destruction.

This is the type of Lord God that some people expect to come. Perhaps St. John the Baptist's disciples are no different. But our Lord + Jesus does not come with fire and brimstone. He comes with love and mercy. This is why when St. John's disciples come to Him He points them to the Prophet Isaiah, who also preached about destruction. He prophesied about the coming exile of the people of Israel on account of their idolatry and forsaking of the Lord God. But Isaiah had also preached comfort and peace. "Comfort, comfort, ye my people" he said. He also preached that when the Messiah came He would give sight to the blind, the deaf would hear again, the lame would walk, the dead would rise up from their graves, and the poor in spirit would have the good news of salvation preached to them.

This is how our Lord + Jesus desires to come to His people. He comes not as a judge with fire and brimstone, but He comes with love and mercy. He comes to deliver His people from the snares of the devil and his angels. He comes to free us from the bonds in which our sinful flesh and this world have bound us. He comes to give us forgiveness, life, and salvation.

He does this by fulfilling the Law perfectly for us. He does this by bearing our sin upon the tree of the holy cross. He suffers and dies innocently in order to pay the penalty of our sins. He enters into death, into the grave, to burst open the gates of death, so that He might open up unto us, and all those who cling to Him in faith, the eternal gates of Heaven. This is who our Lord + Jesus comes to His beloved people. He comes to cure and heal. He is the Great Physician of both body and soul. He comes to us to make us whole again.

Our Lord will come on the Last Day to judge both the quick and the dead, as we confess in the Creed. Will that Day be day of fear and trembling? It will be a day of fear, and fainting of men's hearts for those who have rejected the Lord's grace and mercy in this life. For those who have rejected the compassion that the Lord + Jesus has come to show to this earth; for those who reject His works and merits—His fulfilling of the Law and His sacrifice in our place—there will be much fear and trepidation. For that Day will be for them a day when on account of their rebellion the Lord must do His strange

work and send them to the place which they have chosen by their rejection of Him. He will send them to the place prepared for the devil and his angels. They will be cast into Hell where there will be the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But, my dear friends, we do not need to fear our Lord's coming. For He is showing us during this Advent season how He comes, and how He desires to be seen coming. He comes with love and mercy. He came lowly, humbly, and meekly at His birth. He comes to us with grace and mercy in His gifts of Word and Sacrament. And He will come again on the Last Day to take us from this vale of tears to our eternal home in Heaven. St. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Christ, is pointing his disciples, and us, to the type of Christ that is to come. He points us to the works of the Christ. He comes to heal the sick, bind up the broken-hearted, and give life and salvation to all those who cling to Him in faith.

Our Lord comes to us today to strengthen and bolster our faith. For He gives us the example of St. John the Baptist, who is bound in chains in prison for preaching against Herod and his wife, or rather his brother's wife, who he enticed away from doing her duty. St. John the Baptist is still not shaken like a reed. He is not one wearing soft garments like kings. He is one who trusts fully and completely in the Messiah Which he had been preaching. St. John is our example to remain steadfast in the faith in the midst of turmoil and struggle. His faith was not like a reed shaken in the wind. His faith was firm and steadfast in the Messiah, in the Lord + Jesus. And our Lord points that out to the crowds who had come to hear Him preach. And we, therefore, also get to hear about the steadfast faith of St. John the Baptist, and are given an example for which we can strengthen our own faith.

For, my dear friends, our Lord comes to us in His great love and mercy to draw us to Himself. He comes to us to lead us out of doubt and despair. He comes to forgive us of all our sins through our participation and use of the Blessed Sacraments. And He will come again on the Last Day and bring us into our eternal home. There we will join with all the saints who have gone before us and sing forever and ever the eternal Liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom, which has no end. Therefore, my dear friends, let us rejoice on this Gaudete Sunday. For our Savior and Redeemer has come to us to show us love and mercy. 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!