

Third Sunday of Advent

[Reading I: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54](#)

[Reading II: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24](#)

[Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/121723.cfm>



On this Third Sunday of Advent, we shift from the Gospel of Mark to the beginning of the Gospel according to John. (As mentioned in the first Sunday, Mark is not long enough to cover all the Sundays of the year, so the Gospel of John is used along the way.) John's work was compiled toward the end of the first century and reflects a different social and religious context. Gradually over the decades, it was recognized that Jesus would not return immediately. John is writing to help people recognize how God is active in their lives now and that the reign of God has begun in their hearts (realized eschatology). Secondly, the Jewish and Christian communities had separated. Following the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the Priestly class lost influence since they could not function in Temple sacrifice and prayer. The Pharisees moved forward to become the leaders and definers of what Judaism would be without a Temple. Up until this time, Christianity was considered a branch of Judaism. Following the Pharisee assent, Christians were expelled from the synagogues and lost their exemption from the requirement to worship Caesar. This broadened and expanded the Roman persecution of Christians. Many Christians felt betrayed by the new Jewish leaders and were very angry with them. Thus, in John, the term, "the Jews", is used against Jewish leaders. Unfortunately, this has served as the basis for anti-Semitism throughout the following centuries.

The first reading is closely associated with the ministry of Jesus. It comes from the third part of Isaiah when the people were feeling abandoned. It was a message of hope that God would intervene for those who were left behind by society. "To bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God." In the sermon in Nazareth (Lk 4: 16-22 and Mt 11: 2-6, Jesus refers to these verses as his mission. Contrary to the common Jewish expectation that looked for a king like David with a political empire, Jesus was bringing a kingdom where the poor and vulnerable would fully belong. The prophet and Jesus see their ministries as service for the good of others. This work will not be done by human accomplishment but through the work of God.

The Gospel passage has people sent by the authorities in Jerusalem (the priestly class) to determine who John is. John comes from a lineage of rural priests who often challenged the luxury of the priests in Jerusalem. There are expected roles and want to know which one he is following. John answers their questions in a negative fashion. Are you the Messiah? I am not. Are you Elijah? I am not. Are you the prophet? I am not. All three of these were part of the expected deliverance of Judah. The Messiah was expected to deliver the people from foreign domination and reestablish the kingdom started by David. (We will read about this next week.)

The prophet Elijah worked untiringly against the corruption of his day and called the people back to following God. At the end of his life, Elijah was taken away in a fiery chariot. Since he did not die, he was expected to come again and announce the coming reign of God (II Kings 2: 9 – 11). Malachi further emphasized it in 3:23, which states:

"Now I am sending to you Elijah the prophet, before the day of the LORD comes."

John says he is not Elijah returned, but Jesus states that John fulfilled the mission of Elijah in pointing others to Jesus.

The Prophet refers to a passage in Deuteronomy 18:15 about one who will be like Moses: "A prophet like me will the LORD, your God, raise up for you from among your own kindred; that is the one to whom you shall listen."

John, however, identified himself with the voice crying in the wilderness, a voice of hope and conversion, and not the prophet like Moses. The Pharisees then brought questions as they were doing at the time the Gospel was compiled. They looked to the deeds of John and wanted to know why he

did these. John minimized his deeds and said there is one greater in your midst. The early church also needed to remember that the Risen Lord was in their midst and to follow him each day.

The second reading gives this Sunday the name Gaudete Sunday or rejoice Sunday. The third Sunday of Advent marks the halfway mark in our preparation for celebrating the Incarnation. This passage offers seven actions or attitudes that mark Christian living:

Rejoice always: because of all that God has done for us, we always have a reason to rejoice. Since Christ has come and united the human family with God, all else is a small item.

Pray unceasingly: This does not mean that one should just recite prayer all day. Just as when one is in love thinks of the beloved throughout the day, one should include God in one's thoughts and decisions throughout the day. The Russian Orthodox church saw one way to do this was to think of God with every heartbeat.

In all circumstances, give thanks: For St Ignatius, gratitude or thankfulness was the foundation of the spiritual life. God has blessed us abundantly. Even when difficulties arise, God will not abandon us.

Do not quench the Spirit: The Spirit is God's own Spirit in us. Even when God invites us to do something new or difficult, the Christian should not ignore it. If it is truly the Spirit, God will open the right doors to follow the invitation. It is connected to the following prompts.

Test everything; retain what is good: One must learn to recognize the promptings of the Spirit. Discernment takes time and practice. One learns how the Spirit works in one's life over time and how to distinguish the Spirit from the desires of the ego or the empty promises of evil.

Refrain from evil: This is a recurring theme throughout Judeo-Christian history. Jesus summarized it as loving your neighbor. If one truly loves, one will be following the will of God, which is always life-giving.

Do not despise prophetic utterances: Prophet utterances is not a phrase that we commonly use. Prophets spoke the truth, challenged people who were going in the wrong direction, and offered hope and encouragement in times of suffering. While we rarely give someone the title prophet, many people speak the truth about situations in our lifetimes, like the dangers of nuclear weapons, climate change, racism, and greed. We are called to listen and discern the truth when the utterances are made.

Themes: Prophet and Prophecy
Virtue of Joy

Discernment
Holy Spirit in our lives

Reflection Questions:

Who has helped you to encounter God in your life?

What are some of the signs of God's reign upon the earth?

Which of these directives from Paul are a part of your life? Which are not?

What are some of the ways that you rejoice or am grateful for the little things in life?

Suggestions for Prayer:

For the Church: that we, who have been created in the image and likeness of God, may be instruments of joy and signs of God's love in our society

For a deeper knowledge and understanding: that Spirit will lead us into a fuller relationship with Jesus and help us know and love Jesus more fully

For a joyful spirit: that as we recognize the gift of our relationships and the many blessings that God has given us, our hearts may be grateful and our spirits filled with joy

For a renewal of prayer: that we may recognize how God is communicating with us in every moment and allow our words and deeds to be a response to the love that God has shown us

For freedom of spirit: that God will free us from selfishness, prejudice, and fear so that we may be sisters and brothers to one another