

## Third Sunday of Advent – Year A

[Reading I: Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10](#)

[Responsorial Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10](#)

[Reading II: James 5:7-10](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11](#)

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

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/111019.cfm>



The Gospel selection for the Third Sunday of Advent may seem odd to some. Rather than focusing on the lead-up to the birth of Jesus, it comes from the early ministry of Jesus after John the Baptist has been arrested by Herod, the tetrarch. The passage invites us to examine two key ideas: who is Jesus and who is John the Baptist. These are central issues concerning the Incarnation.

Like many people today, Jesus did not fit the expectations that John had concerning the actions of the Messiah. John and his disciples were looking for someone. The common expectation was for the messiah to be a powerful military and political leader who would free the Jewish people from economic and political oppression. John's preaching last week (Matthew 3: 10-12), warned of the judgment that would come with the Messiah's arrival. Unfruitful trees and worthless chaff would be destroyed.

Jesus came announcing the reign of God and the healing of brokenness. The images, presented in the Isaiah reading for today, show the action of God in restoring Israel. Jesus points to the same actions as a sign of God's action in his ministry. These express that God is at work in and through him and that he has been sent by God.

Similar questions arise today. If there is a God, why do certain things, starving children, natural disasters, and other tragedies occur? Humans tend to want God to act in the ways they seem appropriate and to meet contemporary standards of justice. The scriptures point in a different direction. God has standards that are much different from contemporary ones. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." (Isaiah 55: 8) The revelation of God does not introduce great human power but the transforming love of God. For believers today, the message of the scriptures is not to limit God to our expectations or images. God is beyond the limits of our language, our concepts, and our expected actions. People today are also searching for someone or something. God does not come in major displays of power but with tender expressions of love. Each person is called to be attentive to the signs of God's presence and action in her or his life. St. Ignatius of Loyola invites people to recognize the people, experiences, and things for which one is grateful. In beginning with gratitude, one sees what God has done and can be moved to respond to God who has acted first.

The second theme in the Gospel passage is the identity of John the Baptist. Because John's theme was more in harmony with contemporary expectations, some first-century people placed a greater emphasis on John's teaching than on Jesus' teaching. Jesus challenges his audience regarding their expectations. John did not come in power and dwelt like one of the prophets. Jesus declares that John came to prepare the way for Jesus. He affirms that John is a great human, and like other humans, seeks to hear God's voice and follow God's call. Those who enter into the new life of the reign of God have a vastly different experience. They experience God with them and God's Spirit at work in their life. Jesus introduces a new age and relationship with God. John lived to the foremost the old age and announced that the new age was coming.

The first reading presents signs of God's presence and action in Israel. It will be a time of restoration and wholeness. It is a message of hope to those who are fearful and protection for those who are vulnerable. People will know that God is present and active through the signs of the transformation of the desert, strengthening of the weak, and the blind, lame, and deaf being restored to wholeness. Jesus points to these signs in identifying his ministry when he replies to John's disciples. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises. Those who are searching need to look deeply and recognize these signs.

The second reading comes for the Letter of James. These verses also offer a message of hope. The people are awaiting the second coming of Christ. James urges patience for Jesus will return. He uses the image of the farmer who awaits the rain. He cannot control it and neither can any person control the actions of God. When Christ comes, he will come to judge humanity. Our best preparation for this will be to love one another.

### **Key themes:**

Jesus as the Messiah

The ways of God

Images of God and expectations about God

Patience and waiting

### **Reflection Questions**

What are some signs of God's presence and action in your life?

What is the difference between John's experience of God and our experience?

What makes waiting and being patient difficult for you?

### **Prayer ideas**

For the Church: that we may be instruments of hope, bringing light to the darkness of society, to those who are suffering, and to those who lost purpose and meaning in life

For new awareness: that we may recognize the presence and action of God in the people and events around us and be open to God's invitations to extend the reign of God through our words and deeds

For the gift of patience: that God will help us to trust so that we may wait through various challenges and allow God to show us a new way to proceed

For insight and a new vision: that we may not limit the actions of God but be open to how God touches us through people, prayer, and unexpected events in our lives

For those who are caught in their own expectations: that God will break their bonds and open their vision to all that is possible through God's love

For all who struggle with doubt: that God will open their eyes and hearts to Jesus and the marvelous things which God does within and around them