

We are still in Advent, when we prepare for Jesus' coming on Christmas Day and also at the end of time. Of the four Sundays of Advent, represented by the four candles on the Advent wreath, what makes this Sunday a little different is that the Third Sunday is represented by the rose-colored candle. The Third Sunday is also referred to as Gaudete Sunday (pronounced gau-DAY-tay). Gaudete means joy, because we are all a little like excited children who almost can't wait for Christmas to get here.

Switching gears a little, let's talk about deserts. Some characteristics about deserts are obviously plenty of sand, rocks, sun, heat, and also a lot of cactus. And there is not much rain. In fact, there's a lot of cactus because cactus does well when there is not a lot of rain. What about flowers in the desert? They're not happening much, again, because flowers need a lot of rain. That brings us to the prophet, Isaiah, the source again of the first reading from the old Testament on yet another Advent Sunday. We know that what Isaiah tells us is straight from God because Isaiah is a prophet, which means he can hear the word of God and tell it to all of us. Now...

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah (**Is 35:1-2, 5-6ab, 10**)

The deserts will be glad, and barren lands will rejoice and blossom like flowers. They will bloom everywhere and sing joyful songs. They will be as majestic as Mount Lebanon and as glorious as Mount Carmel or the plain of Sharon. Everyone will see the glory and the majesty of the Lord our God. The blind will see, and the deaf will hear. The disabled will leap about like a deer, and tongues once silent will shout. The people the Lord has rescued will come back singing as they enter Zion. Happiness will be a crown they will always wear. They will rejoice and be glad, because all sorrows and worries will be gone. The Word of the Lord.

We just discussed a lot of characteristics of the desert. Did we mention flowers in the desert? We mentioned that there usually are not many flowers in the desert...not enough rain. But Isaiah said, "The deserts will...rejoice and...flowers will bloom everywhere." What is Isaiah talking about? Is he wrong? Well, he's a prophet. If he is wrong, that would mean that God is wrong. God doesn't usually get it wrong. Isaiah tells us about flowers in the desert because God is promising us something even more wonderful than flowers blooming in a desert. What sort of wonderful stuff did Isaiah mention would be happening? Blind people seeing, deaf people hearing, disabled people leaping around like deer. And a whole bunch of singing, because people will be filled with joy over God's great works.

Now let's turn our attention to our Psalm for today, Psalm 146.

Responsorial Psalm (**Psalm 146:6d-7ab, 7c-8abc, 10**)

(Isaiah 35:4) Lord, come and save us.

Lord, come and save us.

God always keeps His word. He gives justice to the poor and food to the hungry.

Lord, come and save us.

The Lord sets prisoners free and heals blind eyes. He gives a helping hand to everyone who falls.

Lord, come and save us.

The Lord God of Zion will rule forever! Shout praises to the Lord!

Lord, come and save us.

So Psalm 146 says, “God heals blind eyes and gives a helping hand to everyone that falls.” And Isaiah just told us “The blind will see, and the...disabled will leap about like a deer,” and flowers will bloom in the desert, just like it says in the psalm (well, no flowers in the psalm).

Now it’s time for the second reading.

A reading from the letter of St. James (**James 5:7-10**)

My friends, be patient until the Lord returns. Think of farmers who wait patiently for the spring and summer rains to make their valuable crops grow. Be patient like those farmers who don’t give up. The Lord will soon be here! Don’t grumble about each other or you will be judged, and the judge is right outside the door. My friends, follow the example of the prophets who spoke for the Lord. They were patient, even when they had to suffer. The Word of the Lord.

Notice how, even in the middle of Gaudete Sunday, the Church tells us through James that we need to be patient until Jesus returns. Yes, he came on Christmas morning, but that was 2,000 years ago. It’s done. Yes, we celebrate it on Christmas morning, and we prep for it throughout Advent. But His other coming that we prepare for is at the end of time, which is when? Well, it could be tomorrow, although probably not. But would you be ready if it happened tomorrow? That’s what Advent is supposed to help us get ready for, when He comes again, whenever it will be. Until then, James tells us how we should behave. Where have we heard that before? (Hint: St. Paul.)

Now it’s time for the gospel. We remember from last week who John the Baptist was, that is, Jesus’ cousin. You may also remember how when Mary, pregnant with Jesus, visited her cousin, Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist, the baby leapt in Elizabeth’s womb? We also remember that John the Baptist dressed in sandals and camel hair, and he ate honey and grasshoppers. And the most important thing was that Isaiah—yes, that same Isaiah—called him,

“the voice in the desert who cried out, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight His path.’” John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of the Lord. John was, in essence, the last prophet. Now the gospel acclamation and the gospel.

Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Spirit of the Lord now upon me has sent me to bring good news to the poor.

Alleluia, Alleluia.

A reading from the holy gospel according to St. Matthew (**Matthew 11:2-11**).

John was in prison when he heard what Christ was doing. So John sent some of his followers to ask Jesus, “Are You the one we should be looking for? Or must we wait for someone else?” Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you have heard and seen. The blind are now able to see, and the lame can walk. People with leprosy are being healed, and the deaf can hear. The dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing the good news. God will bless everyone who does not reject me because of what I do.” As John’s followers were going away, Jesus spoke to the crowd about John: “What sort of person did you go out into the desert to see? Was he like tall grass blown about by the wind? “What kind of man did you go out to see? Was he someone dressed in fine clothes? People who dress like that live in the king’s palace. “What did you really go out to see? Was he a prophet? He certainly was. I tell you that he was more than a prophet. In the Scriptures God says about him, ‘I am sending my messenger ahead of you to get things ready for you.’ “I tell you that no one ever born on this earth is greater than John the Baptist. But whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.” The gospel of the Lord.

So even though John and Jesus were cousins, they did not know each other growing up. When Jesus was baptized by John, it was probably the first time they were in the same place since their pregnant mothers met each other when John leapt in Elizabeth's womb. So John did not really know who Jesus was, which is why he sent his followers to find out. Jesus knew that John would understand when He quoted from the same passage from Isaiah that we heard in today's first reading: "The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the disabled will leap like a deer." Isaiah was describing what would happen when the Messiah came. And Jesus told John's followers to tell him that what Isaiah described was happening now. Then Jesus praised John as the prophet who became, as described in the Scriptures, "the messenger [sent] ahead of you to get things ready for you," which is what the prophet Malachi (remember Malachi from just a few weeks ago) foretold about "my messenger [who] will prepare the way before me," and who Isaiah described as "a voice in the desert proclaiming 'Prepare the way of the Lord!'"

So Isaiah, Psalm 146, and Jesus talk about the wonderful things that happen when the Messiah comes, which are all causes for rejoicing. And Isaiah and Psalm 146 talk about the rejoicing that occurs when these wonderful things are happening. And James tells us, yes, Jesus is coming again, but we have to wait, just like the farmers wait for the crops. And just like when the crops are harvested, when the Messiah returns there's going to be a whole lot of rejoicing. But wait a minute. Jesus is already with all of us and in all of us right here and now. So on this Gaudete Sunday, be ready to rejoice over the wonderful works of the Messiah when He gets here, real soon on Christmas Day, and at the end of time (whenever that is), but also now, because He is with us already, always.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today's readings. Speak about it with your parents.

Third Sunday of Advent, 2022
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