

3rd Sunday of Advent
December 11, 2022
Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to him with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.'

Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Background:

Last Sunday, the Gospel was from an earlier portion of Matthew's gospel (Mt 3:1-12) that focused on the ministry of John the Baptist. In that text, John addressed the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him, "Who told you to flee from the coming wrath?" (Mt 3:7b) In the last verses of last week's Gospel, John described his own ministry this way:

"I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

(Mt 3:11-12)

At the time of John, there was no clear consensus as to the kind of Messiah to expect. Some hoped that the "one to come" would be someone like a priest who would help fashion them into a holy people. Others hoped that a mysterious figure would come from the heavens to inaugurate the final realm of God. Last week's text indicates that John was expecting a powerful ruler, a military ruler, in the line of David, who would forcibly establish God's realm. In the opening verses of this week's gospel John sends his disciples to question Jesus. "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

Matthew does not say how much John really knows about the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus, only that he has heard of his works. Jesus does not respond directly to John's questions. Rather, he asks him to look at what is happening around him: "The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." Jesus does not claim that he is doing these things, or even that God is doing them through him. He leaves those conclusions for John to make for himself.

Being in prison, John would be aware that he is facing the possibility of execution for challenging Herod's moral behavior. In some sense, Matthew is asking his audience to place themselves in John's situation and imagine the kind of questions and doubts that John would have about Jesus being the Messiah. Are you the one to come, or should we look for another? Have I been misled or been mistaken? Because you do not behave like I thought you would. John may be wondering if Jesus is the person he had anticipated--the one he had spent his life's energy preparing for, the one he had been asking the people to prepare to receive.

It is not difficult to believe that John was asking such questions, because Matthew's community was asking these same questions. And as we are people in the midst of Advent, these are questions for us as well. During Advent, we are being asked to get in touch with our waiting for the "fullness of the coming of God."

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some of the things for which you have waited a long time?
2. Are you aware that others may be looking for signs of God's presence in the world that are very different than your own expectations?
3. Have you ever grown tired of waiting?
4. What are the stories of hope in waiting that you have experienced?
5. Have there been events in your life that led you to rethink how God is present in your life, in the church, and in the world?
6. As John sat day after day in prison, what questions do you think he was asking himself? What do you think his prayer to Yahweh was like?
7. Jesus responds to John's disciples by asking them to take notice of what is happening in the world around them. John and John's disciples have to decide for themselves whether or not they have to "look for another." What is this gospel saying to you? Can you talk with God honestly about that now?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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(An additional page of excerpts has the readings for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.)

Excerpts from the readings for December 11, 2022, the Third Sunday of Advent

The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom.
They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song.
They will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.
Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak,
say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not!
Here is your God, he comes with vindication to save you.
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared;
the lame will leap like a stag, the tongue of the mute will sing.
Those whom the Lord has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing with everlasting joy;
they will meet with joy and gladness; sorrow and mourning will flee.

Lord, come and save us.

The Lord God keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed,

*gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets captives free.
The Lord gives sight to the blind; the Lord raises up those who were bowed down.
The Lord loves the just; the Lord protects strangers.
The fatherless and the widow he sustains, but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations.*

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord.
See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth,
being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.
You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand.
Do not complain about one another, that you may not be judged.
Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates. Take as an example of hardship
and patience the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ,
he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question,
“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”
Jesus said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you hear and see:
the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear,
the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.
And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”
As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John,
“What did you go out to the desert to see? To see a prophet?
Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:
Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.
Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist;
yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Excerpts from Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10; Psalm 146:6-10; James 5:7-10; and Matthew 11:2-11

Excerpts from the readings for December 8, 2022, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

After Adam had eaten of the tree, the Lord God called and asked him, “Where are you?”
He answered, “I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.”
He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? You have eaten from the forbidden tree!”
The man replied, “The woman you put here with me gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it.”
He asked her, “Why did you do such a thing?” She answered, “The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it.”
God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you shall be banned from all the wild creatures;
on your belly shall you crawl, and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel.”
The man called his wife Eve, because she became the mother of all the living.

*Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous deeds.
His right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm.
The Lord has made his salvation known: in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the Lord, all you lands; break into song; sing praise.*

Brothers and sisters: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. He chose us, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us. In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." She was troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" The angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Excerpts from Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Psalm 98:1-4; Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; and Luke 1:26-38

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for December 11th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel from Matthew once again involves John the Baptist. This time he has been imprisoned, and he sends some of his disciples to inquire of Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus replies, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." Then Jesus tells the others with him, "It is written about this one, 'I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.'"

The other readings also have references to anticipating the coming of the Savior, that it will in many ways be cause for rejoicing, and that we should be patient for it. In the first reading, again from Isaiah, "The desert and the parched land will rejoice and bloom with abundant flowers. They will see the glory of the Lord. Be strong, fear not! Your God comes to save you." Psalm 146 exclaims, "The Lord gives sight to the blind; he raises up those who were bowed down. The Lord God keeps faith forever; he shall reign forever." In the second reading, from the letter of James, he writes, "See how the farmer waits for the fruit of the earth, being patient until it receives the rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm. The coming of the Lord is at hand."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.

You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing,

as they rejoice before you as at the harvest.

Isaiah 9:1-2