

3rd Sunday of Advent
December 14, 2025
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) and that focused on the ministry of John the Baptist. In that text John addressed the Pharisees and Sadducees, "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 as...

"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 suggests that John was expecting a powerful 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 take note of 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? 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. We are asked to get in touch with our waiting for the "fullness of the coming of God."

Reflection Questions:

1. 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?
2. How do you think the fact that John is now in prison, and not out baptizing, affects his desire to know more about Jesus?
3. 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? Are their facets of your life or this present moment in history that make you wonder about the kind of Messiah Jesus is, or will be, when the reign of God is established?
4. What is it that you long for at this point in your life, and in our world history?
5. Are you aware that others may be looking for signs of God's presence in the world that are very different from your own? What might they be longing for?
6. Have you ever grown tired of waiting?
7. Who are your heroes in their ability to be faithful while waiting?
8. 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 fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@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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Excerpts from the readings for December 14, 2025, 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

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for December 14th, the Third Sunday of Advent, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher.

In the Gospel from Matthew, Jesus says to the crowds, about John the Baptist, "Did you go out to the desert 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."

The other readings also have references to the coming of the Lord. In the first reading from Isaiah, "The desert and the parched land will exult; they will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song. They will see the glory of the Lord. Your God comes to save you." Psalm 146 exclaims, "The Lord God keeps faith forever. The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations." In the second reading, James writes, "Make your hearts firm. The coming of the Lord is at hand."

Last week, on the second Sunday of advent, John the Baptist was the center of attention, and he was declaring himself unworthy to carry the sandals of the one who would come after him. This week, the declaration is reversed. Jesus is given prominence, when the imprisoned Baptist sends his disciples to ask of Jesus, "are you the One?" Jesus replies, "Go and tell John what you hear and see," And then Jesus speaks to the crowds about John: "There has been none greater than John the Baptist. 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.'" And then Jesus goes on to make his greater point, proclaiming the Kingdom: "There has been none greater than John the Baptist... yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Joe

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