

**Sermon**  
**Advent 3 Year B**  
***Gaudete Sunday***

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

**John 1:6-8,19-28**

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No."

Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

**Prayer:**

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...

**Homily:**

Once, a long time ago and very far away,

in a Baptist Church in Texas, a little girl was training  
for the Christmas Pageant.

Her part started with her saying:

"And the *Virgin* Mary was with Child."

Her Mom made really sure that the little girl knew her part,  
And that she understood it was about Jesus being born.  
Everything was going very well.

It's a complex story for a little Kid,  
But that little girl was really smart.  
It wasn't enough for her just to say a bunch of stuff.  
She needed to *understand* what the story was about.

So, as they were driving to Church, she asked her Mom,  
"Which virgin was Jesus' mother?

The *virgin Mary* or the *King James Virgin*?"

*Virgin or Version?* It's easy to get confused.<sup>i</sup>

Little details can make all the difference. Tone of voice.

Change of pitch. Body language. <sup>ii</sup> *Inflection*.

Imagine a husband and wife talking in the kitchen:

One says something, and the other says, “Yes, *dear*.”

Is that “Yes, dear, I fly to do thy bidding?”

Or is it that “Yes, *dear*”.

(grumble, grumble, doggone it, etc., etc.)

Is that with a shrug of the shoulders? Or is that with a smile?

Inflection is such a simple thing.

Body language is a window to the soul.

John’s interrogators asked him: “*Who (the heck) are you?*”

Wouldn’t be great to know the inflection they used?

Did they say it with a snarl: “*Who are you?*”

Were they dismissive: “*Who are you?*”

Were they simply curious: “*Who. Are. You?*”

*Who are you?*

It’s such an important question. It’s mentioned in all four gospels.

They asked John, “*Who are you?*”, but he didn’t say, “Who” he was.

He told them *who he wasn’t!*

I am not the Christ, he said. I am not the Messiah.

I am not Elijah, or any other old time hero.

So the men said to John,  
Since you aren't the Messiah, and you aren't Elijah,  
or the prophet, *why* are you baptizing?

In other words,  
“Since you're a *nobody*,  
why are you acting like you're *somebody*?”

“If you're not somebody important,  
Why should *anybody* pay attention to *you*?”

“*Who am I*” ?, said John:  
“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness  
'Make straight the way of the Lord.' ” <sup>iii</sup>  
Prepare the way for the Lord.<sup>iv</sup>

Preparation is what Advent's all about.  
Preparation. *Our* preparation.  
Because something big is coming.

Our *Salvation is just around the corner!*  
*And with that salvation comes God's perfect Freedom,*  
*and the joy which passes all understanding.*

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote that

Advent is our “*anticipation of ... new community in the world*”...

In that new community we can be, at last,  
all that God has been calling us to be,  
since Adam and Eve’s first strolled in the Garden.

A new community, is just around the corner,  
Formed by Yahweh’s mighty hand ...  
Built and protected and loved by Jesus.

Advent is a time for reflection, and grace and Joy.  
Today, is the 3rd Sunday of Advent.

We Anglo-Catholics call it “Gaudete Sunday”.  
The word ‘Gaudete’, is Latin and it means ‘Joy’.  
That’s why we lit this rose colored candle.

Whether you call it “rose” or you call it “pink”  
It’s a happy color, which reminds us that Advent is about Joy.  
And we are called to live out Advent Joy as  
God’s community; God’s family; God’s People.

What is Advent Joy about?  
It’s about our baptism, and knowing that we are one  
with God and God’s Kingdom.

It's about knowing that, through our baptism,  
we are one people, living as God's family ...  
no matter where we're born, or what color our skin is,  
or whose sign was in our front yard this past November.

It's about knowing that we are God's special creation,  
and that we are loved,  
by God and by the Community God has given us.  
This safe and special place:  
St. Christopher's. Our parish home.

In the midst of this – heaven reaching out to the earth –  
Our commercial world ramps up for Christmas,  
lamenting the absence of fanatic shoppers.

I understand capitalism and return on investment.  
I understand the cost of money.

I grieve for the small shop owners and restaurants that have failed.  
I pray for a wise solution that passes  
the Senate and the House and is signed into law.

*I get it.*

And yet, even amidst the Covid crisis,  
The Lord offers us the peace which passes all understanding.

It is a peace which focuses less on craving and coveting,  
And more on sharing and loving,  
Living our joy in Him, and  
in the community he has called us to.<sup>v</sup>

John the Baptist, professed the Christ and  
proclaimed God's peace, hope, joy and love to all people.  
That is our job, too.

We have been called to make straight the path,  
so that all people might share in our joy.

One day the Kingdom will come, in its full ness.  
But, you know, it *is* here already. In part.  
John was its witness. And so are we.<sup>vi</sup>

It's hard to be a Witness.  
These are hyper-sensitive, politically correct days,  
I know it's hard.

I've done Ash Wednesday in front of the same courthouse,  
Where, the day before, I was arguing cases.  
*I never knew who would walk up, and ask for ashes.*

*Really fun! Occasionally awkward!*

My collar was a public witness.

The Church is our public witness.

And so is your patient smile, as some meathead runs a red light

And cuts you off on that busy drive to Austin.

We must bear witness to the joy in hearts,<sup>vii</sup>

To the truth we offer, not by what we say, but by what we do.

- Feed the hungry.
- Embrace the poor and downtrodden.
- Protect the traveler.
- Bind up the ill and distressed.
- Turn the other cheek.
- Forgive others.

Seek and serve Christ in all persons,  
loving your neighbor as yourself.

This Advent ... Be the Good News.

**-AMEN**

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<sup>i</sup> Living as a Christian is complex, because God is complex. Which version of God do we follow?

<sup>ii</sup> See, *Inflection Is Everything*, Advent 3 (B) – 2014 December 13, 2014 , Machrina L. Blasdell

<sup>iii</sup> John is borrowing from Isaiah, but he tweaks his quote, for his own purposes. In Luke's Gospel we hear a fuller text quote from Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled – Every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall be made straight – And the rough ways made smooth." See, John 3:4-6

<sup>iv</sup> Luke 3:4-5

<sup>v</sup> Because we are not called to take joy in our possessions.

<sup>vi</sup> The English word witness is, in Greek μαρτυρία , ἡ, martyría or martyréo; those two words are used more than forty-five times in John's Gospel. They are not magic words, but instead originated in a legal context... public testimony to something that one guarantees is absolutely true. Like a trial witness!

<sup>vii</sup> Americans tend to view religion as a private matter; we don't want to hear about someone else's particular beliefs.