

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT / GAUDETE

Text: St. Matthew 11:2-11

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

What are the “*signs*” that bear witness to the fact that JESUS is truly the CHRIST who comes to save us? They are these: *“The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.”*

Therefore, blessed are those who are not offended because CHRIST has not revealed more; who do not demand evidence and signs of proof in *our* age but hear and believe the Word of God, which He has given for all ages. For these signs of the advent of the KING of kings and LORD of lords are for you and your children and all those afar off in time and space who will believe. These signs are given that you may believe, and that believing you may have life in His Name.

In hearing *and* believing these things, you may rest assured that your iniquity is pardoned; you have received from the LORD’s hand double grace and mercy to forgive all your sins. For our God is gracious and merciful. He is slow to anger and abounds in steadfast love. He is full of compassion and forgiveness. He is not a God of vengeance, rather, He comes with mercy and healing in His wings, seeking you out in order that you be saved.

For this reason, God sends His forerunner, Saint John the Baptist. John is sent to prepare your heart to receive your SAVIOR. He comes to make ready the way of the LORD by giving *“light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death...”* and by guiding their feet into the way of peace. St. John the Baptist came pointing to JESUS as the answer to all the brokenness of this world, and the emptiness that haunts each human soul.

Therefore, *“lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid!”* Let all doubt be put to flight. JESUS is the coming One, the MESSIAH, the CHRIST, and there is no other!

In our Gospel text, we are given to see JESUS through the eyes of St. John the Baptist. This recounting of a moment in our LORD’s life is written in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, and though it tells of our LORD’s response to John’s question, *“Are You the coming One, or do we look for another?”* John sends his beloved disciples

to our LORD, not out of fear or doubt, but that they would hear for themselves from the very lips of their MESSIAH the veracity of John's own words, "*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*"

You see, John's hour was upon him. He was to decrease; our LORD to increase. John knew that the salvation of his disciples did not depend on their hanging on *his* every word, but rather on those of He who would hang on a cross. For it was for this that John was born, to call all mankind to repentance and to point the way to JESUS and the establishment of His Kingdom among men.

As the prophet of the Most High, John prepared the way for JESUS. He filled in the valleys, brought low the mountains, made straight the crooked, and the rough places He made smooth. He pointed the way to JESUS who heals the brokenness of men's souls.

With his question, it is as though John the Baptist's boney finger literally points out from the very pages of Holy Scripture as he continues to point JESUS out for us today. In this way, John remains the forerunner of CHRIST as he points to the only One who can save you. Follow that finger with your eyes and heart and see your Salvation in the person of JESUS. The finger of John the Baptist points to the SON of God!

In Holy Scripture, the Greek word for messenger is "ἄγγελος." We say "*angel.*" Therefore, St. John the Baptist is an angel, a messenger of the LORD, and his message *is not* a prophecy that applies alone to the dusty past, nor does it simply apply to some far-off future event. St. John points out that which is available in the here and now in our Flesh and Blood LORD, JESUS CHRIST, the very same Incarnate SON of God whom John proclaimed. His message is about JESUS, who alone is our release from bondage to sin, Satan, and the grave.

John's message is that JESUS alone can make your spiritually blind eyes to see, and your spiritually deaf ears to hear. John proclaims that JESUS alone raises you who are dead in your sins even as He promises to raise your body up from death and the grave when He returns on the clouds of Heaven to claim you on the Last Day. Only Jesus gives your lame legs strength enough to bear up under the weight of your cross and to stand before Him when He again appears on the Last Day.

St. John the Baptist points us to JESUS and His Cross by asking, "*Are You the coming One, or do we look for another?*" Just as for his disciples, John asks this question that you may hear the answer from your SAVIOR's own lips. JESUS' answer is for all who are laid low, all those who feel unworthy, all the weak and the stumbling, all those who feel they have no hope, and all those who feel like they have nowhere to turn. JESUS, the Lamb of God, is the answer to John's question; the only answer!

Therefore, if you would see, then look to this Lamb. If you would walk uprightly, then follow this Lamb. If you would be cleansed from sin, then follow this Lamb. It is His Word that opens the ears of sinful men and women. It is His Gospel that brings the dead to life. In CHRIST, your warfare is ended; your iniquity is pardoned. With Isaiah, St. John the Baptist points to this Lamb and says, *“Behold your God!”*

This Lamb is the promised MESSIAH, the CHRIST, the anointed SON of God who has come to seek and save that which was lost. He is our “SAVIOR” who seeks out the lame, the deaf, the blind, and the spiritually dead; He brings the good news of salvation to the poor in SPIRIT. He comes bringing redemption from death and the grave. He comes establishing His Kingdom and fills it with all those who were once lame, deaf, blind, and dead, who now walk uprightly, who can now hear, who now see, and all those He has raised from the dead. He has filled His Kingdom with sinners like you and me!

This Lamb of God comes to feed His flock like a shepherd; to gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom. He comes *“for us men and for our salvation.”* He comes to suffer and die, and take His life up again for you and all mankind. He comes to help and comfort you in all things. This He does by washing you in His bloody Baptism and by giving to you the Medicine of Immortality—His Body and Blood—to eat and to drink. He comes to you bringing His gentle Word of Absolution.

This is the Lamb, the CHRIST, our SAVIOR, our JESUS, to whom St. John the Baptist points. He is the Lamb who braved the wilderness of sin and death to redeem you from sin, Satan, and the grave. The Law and the Prophets reigned until John; now comes the Gospel in human flesh, the One to whom John pointed—JESUS, *“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*

The Law and the Prophets and the death it brings must now fade. The Old Covenant with the blood of cattle, and goats, and sheep must fade. St. John the Baptist must fade. These all must diminish. JESUS has increased. The New Covenant in His Blood has increased. Now our days in the wilderness of sin and death have faded to nothing. Look not to death and the Law. Behold now the CHRIST who is JESUS, the LORD of our life and God of our salvation, who has taken away the sin of the world.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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