

- The Church brings John the Baptist to our minds in Advent as an example we should follow—to live simply, to practice self-mortification, to exhort others to turn from evil and sin, and to direct others to Christ.
- A lot of commentators focus on John’s question about Jesus: “*Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?*” Was John doubting?
- Well...we don’t know John’s thinking, but it seems that John anticipated a kinglike, conquering Messiah as did most of the Jews...one who would cleanse the land of evil and wrongdoers... and he expected him soon.
- We see this in John proclaiming: “*Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!*”, and “*Even now the ax is laid at the root of the tree; every tree...that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire!*” (Mat 3:10-11)
- And then in Luke it says: “*And with many other words John... preached the good news to them.*”
- But why was it good news? Because John is preaching about the coming—the advent—of the Messiah, who would lead God’s people from slavery, mete out justice to all, and usher in unending prosperity...not in the material sense as John may have thought, but in the eternal, spiritual sense.
-
- But John doesn’t know the plan of salvation in its entirety. Yes, he had heard the voice of the Father at Jesus’ baptism proclaiming “*This is my beloved Son*”, but John didn’t know how God would work it all out.
- And this is most likely the basis for John sending of his disciples to ask Jesus: “*Are you He who is to come, or should we look for another?*”
- Because Jesus was anything but a warrior general fomenting revolution against Israel’s conquerors as John may have expected.

2013

- So in Jesus' response to John disciples, Jesus is simply telling them: *"Tell John what you see. By my works the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, lepers are cleansed, the poor have the gospel proclaimed to them. These are the signs foretold by the prophets. There is no one else; I AM the Messiah...come to save the people of God through mercy, not by conquest."*
- Jesus is saying: *Remember God's word, and see me fulfilling it.*
-
- And then...Jesus praises John to the crowd.
- *"Did you go out to see a reed swayed by the wind?"*...someone swayed by popular opinion...someone who loves the praise of men more than the praise of God? You will not see that in John!
- Did you go to see someone in fine clothing—someone who loves money more than truth...who can be bought off? You will not see that in John, clothed in camel's hair cloth, catching locusts for food.
- Did you go to see a prophet? Yes, he is...but much more than a prophet. The prophets speak of him...and prophets don't speak of their peers, but speak of those greater than themselves.
- John is the bridge between the old and the new...between the old covenant and the new and everlasting covenant.
- A little later in the Gospel, Jesus says that John is the return of Elijah, the archetype of prophets...who was foretold would immediately precede the Messiah.
- And then Jesus says: *"Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist"*.
-
- Imagine such praise by Jesus Himself!
- But what made John so great?
- It was his total love of God...his sincerity for the spreading of God's kingdom...and the role that God had given him to play in salvation history—he who prepared the way of the Lord.
- John tilled the ground...and Jesus—the sower—planted the seed.

- And it is John's dedication to truth—to God. Not a reed swayed by the whims of Man, but steadfast in his determination to follow God...to proclaim the Word of God. He would eventually die for his courage and his fidelity to truth.
-
- And yet...in many ways we are greater...for, as Jesus says, the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.
- The kingdom of God is not yet fully realized...but we are on its virtual doorstep.
- We have had the privilege of knowing Christ far better than John would have known Him. We have received God's grace in the sacraments. We become tabernacles of Christ—of God—when we receive the Eucharist...the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God. These things John was never privileged to do.
- Jesus said to his disciples: *“Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”* (Mat 13:17)
- And John--as favored as he was by God--had not witnessed the saving grace—the absolute love of God—which proceeded from Jesus' redemptive suffering on the cross.
-
- Because Jesus proclaims John as great, John's teaching, therefore, must also be great—our immediate need of repentance and the turning away from whatever we do against the teaching of God.
- Can we be complacent...presuming on the mercy of God and His forgiveness, and do whatever we will?
- Never. St. Paul asks us: *“...do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?...For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who...do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.”* (Rom 2:4-8)

- Yes...we have been born into the kingdom of God by sacramental baptism...sustained by the Eucharist and the other sacraments— ALL great mercies of God for us.
- But we who are great by these gifts of grace--we who have been lifted high—also have a long way to fall if we reject God’s mercy by abandoning the will and teaching of God...of Jesus.
- For, as Peter tells us: “...if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell...” (2 Peter 2:4), then how can we expect better if we forsake God...forsake His Son who died upon the cross so that we may have eternal life?
-
- Jesus comes to us to OFFER us His mercy—a mercy offered through His immense love...but he does not force us to take it.
- The judgment that John spoke of is still pending...but is laid aside for those who love God. And what is the love of God? St. John tell us: “*This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.*” (1 Jn 5:3) And Jesus likewise says: “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*” (Jn 14:15)
- It is those who will receive the light of everlasting life.
-
- In 1.5 weeks we celebrate the coming of Jesus...who offers this eternal joy to us...requiring only that we do what is good and right—loving God and our neighbor.
- So let us heed John’s advice, and prepare the way of the Lord by discarding what is not Godly.
- I always like the formula of knighthood in the movie “Kingdom of Heaven”: “*Be without fear in the face of your enemies. Be brave and upright that God may love thee. Speak the truth always, even if it leads to your death. Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong.*”
- And as the prophet says, “*Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD... will be with you...Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice...; it may be that the LORD...will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph*” (Amos 5:14-15)...to those who

seek always to walk the narrow and difficult path...to walk the way of Christ.

Reading 1

[Is 35:1-6a, 10](#)

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.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to them,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
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;
with divine recompense
he comes to save you.
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,
the ears of the deaf be cleared;
then will the lame leap like a stag,
then the tongue of the mute will sing.

Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return
and enter Zion singing,
crowned with everlasting joy;
they will meet with joy and gladness,
sorrow and mourning will flee.

[Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10.](#)

Responsorial Psalm

R. (cf. Is 35:4) **Lord, come and save us.**

or:

R. Alleluia.

The LORD God keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets captives free.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

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.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

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.

R. Lord, come and save us.

or:

R. Alleluia.

[Jas 5:7-10](#)

Reading 2

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, brothers and sisters, 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, brothers and sisters,
the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

[Mt 11:2-11](#)
Gospel

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?
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.”