

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT-2022

**READINGS: Isaiah 11:1-10;
Responsorial Psalm-Psalm 72;
Romans 15: 4-9;
Gospel of Matthew 3:1-12**

Advent Mission: Repenting and building a new community.

We begin today's homily with a question. When you hear the name John the Baptist, what comes to mind? We may all have some idea about the identity of John the Baptist in the Bible. The Bible presents him as a strange person--serious and blunt, as a great prophet and also as a man of God. We may associate the name with baptism. We know that he is one of the saints in heaven and the patron saint of the province of Quebec. Today, our Advent journey brings us to the Second Sunday of Advent-- depicted by the lighting of the second candle on the Advent Wreath. Last Sunday, the readings of the First Sunday of Advent invited us to be awake at all times so that we may be ready for the coming of the Lord. Today's Gospel reading from Matthew focuses on John the Baptist. As part of our Advent journey, today's liturgy invites us to reflect on the Gospel reading with the other two readings to help us understand the identity of John the Baptist.

Today's Gospel reading begins, "In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'" In using the word "repent," John the Baptist called for a change of heart and change in conduct. He called the people to turn their lives from rebellion to obedience to God. The expression "the kingdom of heaven" occurs only in the Gospel of Matthew. It describes the effective rule of God over his people. In its fullness, "the kingdom of heaven" includes not only human obedience to God's word, but the triumph of God over evil and death. The clothing of John the Baptist recalls the austere dress of the prophet Elijah reported in the Second Book of Kings (2 Kings 1:8). At the time of John the Baptist, the Jewish people expected the return of Elijah from heaven to prepare Israel for the final revelation of God's kingdom. According to the Evangelist Matthew, this expectation was fulfilled in John the Baptist's ministry. The ritual performed by John the Baptist to signal the change of heart was baptism with water. The cleansing and the purification by baptism were to be reflected in the good deeds of the repentant.

John the Baptist acknowledged that his baptism for repentance was not the same as the baptism that was to be offered by the one who was coming after him. John the Baptist told the crowd: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." The baptism of the one who was to come involved the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit in the purification of the repentant person. John the Baptist is also referred to as the one whom the Prophet Isaiah spoke of: the one preparing the way of the Lord and making the Lord's path straight (Isaiah 40). When we examine today's Gospel

reading in the context of Advent, we can discern that John the Baptist's role was to prepare his contemporaries to welcome Jesus. Matthew wanted his primarily Jewish audience to understand the identity of Jesus. He used John the Baptist's mission to teach the people that Jesus is a Jew, divine and greater than John the Baptist. From today's reading we understand that John the Baptist is preparing Jesus for his own mission that will proclaim the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

The story about John the Baptist in the Gospel reading brings us to the first reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. The passage begins, "On that day: A shoot can come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The name "Jesse" refers to the father of David. The word "stump" has the same meaning as "shoot." The passage describes the characteristics of an unnamed messiah. The messiah would be filled with such gifts as wisdom, understanding and the fear of God. The passage also pictures a time of perfect harmony of the messiah: "the wolf shall live with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid." This picture of harmony is a dramatic symbol of the universal peace and justice of the messianic times.

The setting of today's first reading was during the reign of King Ahaz. The king was unfaithful to Israel's covenant relationship with God because he failed to put his trust in God. Isaiah's message was that a day would come when God would send his people a future king. The king is described as righteous and faithful and his actions would bring peace and hope to his people. When we examine the first reading and the Gospel passage, we can discern that they are connected to each other. In the context of what we are celebrating--Advent--we see that the coming of the messiah in the first reading is fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ.

Paul taught the early Christians about the hope of the coming of Jesus Christ. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul begins, "Brothers and sisters, whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Paul stressed that our hope is in Jesus Christ and that the Gentiles and Jews all share in the covenantal love of God. Paul therefore urged the early Christians to welcome and love each other. By loving each other, the Jew and the Gentile Christians would glorify God, the Father of Jesus Christ.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we have come together to celebrate the Eucharist, our nourishment for our Advent journey. What do the three readings tell us about the season of Advent? This question brings us to the mission of John the Baptist. The name of John the Baptist is featured prominently during the season of Advent because of his role in preparing his people for the coming of the Lord. So as Christians, how do we respond to the mission of John the Baptist? We see Advent as the time to prepare spiritually to celebrate Christmas. As we have been away from parish life due to the pandemic, this is the time for us to learn to surrender ourselves to be transformed by the Spirit of God. The gifts to the unnamed messiah mentioned in the first reading are considered the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Today's readings encourage us to renew within our hearts the gifts of understanding, wisdom and strength. Our mission this Advent season is to use our gifts to prepare others to welcome the Lord. We prepare others

when we all come together to build a stronger community, a community where our children are prepared to celebrate the sacraments, where we can serve in any of the ministries in the parish and where we can reach out to those in need. Today, let us be inspired by the ministry of John the Baptist. As we come to receive the Eucharist, let us hear the word of John the Baptist to repent so that we can all walk towards a community of peace, justice and love.

Fr. Yaw Acheampong