

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Third Sunday in Advent (Gaudete) (2021)

We Look for the Lamb of God

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“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3, ESV)

Last Sunday we heard our Lord’s warnings of the signs which will precede His second coming, signs such as earthquakes and floods. Sadly, the people of the the Midwest, especially those in Kentucky, experienced what must have seemed like a second coming event, as they were devastated by monster tornadoes which took the lives of many and injured many more. Their lives are turned completely upside down. Their homes and businesses destroyed. Yet, if they are children of God, followers of Jesus Christ, they know their loved ones, who lives were taken in the storm, have received the promise of those who are brought to faith in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel. No longer do they need fear the signs of which Jesus spoke, today they are secure in God’s kingdom of glory, held securely in His hands. But was John the Baptist this confident when he languished in the dungeon of Herod’s palace?

This is a question that many have asked and often come to the wrong conclusion. Yes, John the Baptist languished in the dungeon of Herod’s palace, but so too did the martyrs who followed him languish in prisons facing death by the cruelest of means, however, they did not fear, they knew of the Savior promised, they knew of the Savior sent by God, so they rejoiced. God had overcome death, He had overcome sin in the life, death, and resurrection of His beloved Son. John the Baptist knew this too. So, no, John the Baptist did not lack confidence in the One of whom He was the forerunner. John the Baptist did not lack confidence in Christ Jesus.

So, as we look forward to the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus, we need not look at it with fear. Instead, we can look at it just as we look forward to the upcoming celebration of Christmas. On that blessed day God fulfills His promise to send a Savior into the world whose life, death, and resurrection offers relief to all mankind from the penalty of sin. On that blessed Last Day, God fulfills His promise of the Gospel and through the resurrection, brings His children home to be with Him and His Son Jesus for all eternity, safe and secure in the new heaven and new earth. The dungeons we make, the dungeons the world creates, cannot hold us as we eagerly look to the Advents of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

The Gospel Reading for today speaks of John the Baptist whose surroundings were anything but cheerful. He was in prison, an innocent victim of an evil woman’s hatred and her brother-in-law’s fear of her reproach. Herod and Herodias were violating the Sixth Commandment without fear of the people or God. Therefore, John the Baptist’s called Herod out for his offense. John had done nothing wrong. Indeed, he was in the right. He was imprisoned for the crime of preaching God’s Word. John spoke out against the leader of the people who assumed he was above God. Where are the John’s of today? Our president and many in congress endorse, support, and enable abortion, even to the point of birth. Yet their religious leaders do not call them to repentance. No, to the contrary, they eagerly welcome them to the communion rail. Where are the John’s of today?

Before his imprisonment, John’s life had been dedicated to preparing the way of our Lord Jesus. He preached repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Now his liberty was

denied. He is chained in the darkness of a dungeon. But he did not succumb to the gloom. No, even in these depressing circumstances he found joy in thinking of his and the world's Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. He found joy in helping others find the Lord. So, from his prison cell he sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question: ***"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"*** Had prison brought John to the brink of unbelief? We shall see.

Ever since God had made His promise to send a Savior who would overcome the deception of the serpent, the eyes of God's people in the Old Testament had scanned the horizon for the coming of the One whom they called Christ. Eve waited for Him, and she thought she had Him when Cain was born (Gen. 4:1). Lamech looked for Him and thought the child he called Noah was the expected Christ (Gen. 5:29). Jacob, on his deathbed, spoke of Him and called Him Shiloh (Gen. 49:10). The people of the Old Testament waited with great expectation for the coming of the Christ. So much did the people await His coming that they even considered John the Baptist to be the Christ who was to come. When Herod asked where the Christ would be born, the chief priest and scribes answered him, ***"In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:"*** (Matthew 2:5, *ESV*) The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well said, ***"I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things"*** (John 4:25 *ESV*). So, yes, the people waited for the coming of the Messiah, for His First Advent, and they were justified in their expectations, because God has promised them a Savior. The people of the Old Testament waited for the Christ, for His First Advent, and we, the people of the New Testament, await His Second Advent even as we turn our hearts and minds to the celebration of His First Advent.

His coming is an important event, thus the question addressed to Him by the disciples of John the Baptist is of great importance. Many had forgotten, or never truly knew the importance of the coming of Christ. Many had become earthly minded; they knew no greater troubles than earthly ones. Many of the people of God decried their Roman subjugation, and they could not wait until the Christ came to release them from their captivity, while restoring Israel to its former glory. However, God's promise of a Savior was infinitely greater than salvation from human captivity, His promise offered salvation from captivity to sin and eternal bondage to Satan. The promised Christ would bring spiritual blessings releasing all mankind from the curse of sin, death, and the devil. He would redeem Israel and the world from their iniquities. He would be the fountain of cleanness against sin. He would bear the sins of all mankind upon the Altar of the Cross. His atoning sacrifice would be the single, sin-cleansing achievement for all men for all time. In Him alone men would find forgiveness and salvation. The children of God had looked forward to these blessings since the Garden of Eden. Moreover, when our Lord revealed Himself at His dedication, the righteous Simeon blessed God and said, ***"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel"*** (Luke 2:29-32 (*ESV*)).

Once our Lord started His ministry on earth others came to confess Him as the Christ. The apostle Andrew confessed to his brother Peter, ***"We have found the Messiah"*** (John 1:41 *ESV*). Philip confessed to Nathanael, ***"We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth"*** (John 1:45 *ESV*), and Nathanael confessed, ***"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"*** (John 1:49 *ESV*). Furthermore, as they continued to follow Jesus their conviction became even stronger, for with Peter all the apostles confessed, ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"*** (Matthew 16:16 *ESV*). Thus, when the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked, ***"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"*** theirs was not the confession of the apostles of Christ; theirs was the doubt of a world born out of reliance on worldly things and worldly people. There's was a doubt

predicated on salvation by works. However, our Lord did not hesitate to provide them with an emphatic affirmation of His identity.

It is true in His response; our Lord did not provide an affirmation that simply said *yes*; instead, He gave them an indirect answer. However, many times before He had answered simply *yes*. But, for the disciples of John the Baptist He answered, ***“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them”*** (vv. 4-5). These words of Jesus offer the strongest possible *yes* to the question of John the Baptist. The deeds of His ministry affirm that God is at work in Him. More than the feeble works of men, which cannot save, the works that our Lord Jesus Christ performed were a fulfillment of the Law and the outpouring of God’s grace and mercy upon His people. Our Lord’s works were good because they were accomplished by the One who accomplishes man’s salvation. His sacrificial work on the cross established the long-awaited new age of salvation.

The very brokenness, the physical infirmities of God’s people are a testimony to a fallen and broken creation because of man’s sin. Yet, the very prophecy of Isaiah promises that God will come to restore and heal His people (Is. 35:4-6; 61:1) and those Old Testament prophecies were being fulfilled in Christ. The age of salvation is upon them; He *is* the One who was to come, and His words invite the disciples of John to receive Him in faith for who He is; the Son of the living God.

With His words our Lord also invites us to believe; inviting us to faith and discipleship, reminding us that, ***“Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*** (Matthew 11:6, *ESV*)

John the Baptist was not offended by Christ. Thus, while he was suffering in prison, he sent his disciples to Jesus, not for his sake, but for theirs. One should not interrupt John’s question given to his disciples as a sign of his struggling faith. On the contrary, our Lord asked rhetorically, ***“What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.”*** (Matthew 11:8, *ESV*) No, John the Baptist was no reed shaken by the wind. He had been blessed to personally hear God say of Jesus, ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”*** (Matthew 3:17 *ESV*). He had personally been selected by God to be the forerunner of Christ. When the angel Gabriel announced his birth, he told his father Zechariah; ***“you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord ... he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb ... he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God ... he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah ... to make ready for the Lord a people prepared”*** (Luke 1:14-17 *ESV*). No, John the Baptist was no bent or shaken reed; instead, he was the forerunner of Christ, faithful all his days.

John’s disciples had doubts as to the validity of Jesus as the Messiah. Moreover, with the imprisonment of their rabbi, their doubts and fears began to multiply. They are asking, “What are we to do now that our spiritual leader has been brought low by evil and wicked men?” However, John, aware of his follower’s plight does what he has always done; he leads them to the Christ; ***“The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”*** (John 1:29 *ESV*). What better way to calm their troubled hearts than placing them into the very palm of God’s promise, the true source of peace, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

Like the disciples of John the Baptist, many find themselves overwhelmed with the troubles of this world: sickness, injury, disability, depression, loneliness, raising doubts that question an existence of a loving God. Or if they have been brought to faith, earthly fear begins to shake their faith in the promise of God. They begin to question their faith, to question the very thought of

God, heaven, and eternal life. Such as these can be your friends, acquaintances, or members of your family, your children, mother, father, or spouse. Would you not show them the same love that John the Baptist showed his disciples? Would you remind them not to be offended by Christ, but to embrace Him, especially in their hour of need? When they ask you, "Who is the Christ?" You can answer; "He is not a judge or a tormentor or tyrant, as the reason of men suggest, instead He is the bearer of our iniquities." He is the One, ***"who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Cor. 1:4 ESV)***. He is God's offer of eternal life for all who believe. He is the One who came into the world to offer Himself as a living sacrifice for your sins. He is the one who allowed Himself to be nailed to the Altar of the Cross to take your sins upon Himself, burying them with His death and burial, thereby reconciling you to God. On the Altar of the Cross, He took upon Himself the punishment that was rightfully yours for your sins, so you wouldn't have to endure the wrath of God. His death has earned for you eternal life. So, even though in your present condition you may be suffering, our Lord Jesus has overcome your suffering with His, for ***"Whoever believes in him is not condemned" (John 3:18 ESV)*** but is promised ***"eternal life" (John 3:16 ESV)***.

John the Baptist asked, ***"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (v. 3)***. The answer is simple, there is no other to look for. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.