

St Pius & St Anthony 3rd Sunday Advent Homily 2026 Year A Matt 3:1-12

Something doesn't add up in today's gospel? Two questions arise in my mind – Two problems jump out at me. First, Why is John acting like he doesn't know Jesus? I want to say, "You remember—You baptized Him! Hearing the Father's Voice and saw the Holy Spirit in a Dove descend upon Him (Matt 3:16-17). *(He's the same that you already pointed out twice saying, "Behold the Lamb of God"—John 1:29, 36)* And another question, maybe it seems less important (but I find it related), that Matthew says John hears of Jesus' ministry 'in prison'? Matt 11:2 tells us that "When John heard in prison..." He's in prison! How does he hear? But maybe that is where these two disciples come in? They were likely with him daily visiting. They were that close. Now, it surprises many people that John actually had disciples *(we recall that 'voice of one crying out in wilderness' line -Matt 3:3, and picture a lonely crank in the desert!)* But John had a following! John's disciples are mentioned several times. In Matt 9:14, we hear about their fasting, "The disciples of John approached Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Also, in Luke 11:1, they had good reputation of prayerfulness, "One of Jesus' disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." But for sure, John's disciples were devoted to him. We will hear of how dear and close he was to them, when he dies, they'll risk everything to go to him, and "they took his body and buried it" (Matt 14:12) John .was universally admired, (even if feared as when we hear about his rugged fiery side)

So, how do we settle this question, "Does John know Jesus or not?" Today's whole dialogue encounter through proxies between John and Jesus, turns out to offer a solution to the problem of transition between John's preparatory ministry and Jesus' fulfilling ministry!

John had disciples, and Jesus calls us to "Come follow" Him (Matt 4:19) so there has to be a letting go of one to accept the other. Change is hard, transitions are hard. And even though John and Jesus seem to work so well together, and both speak so fondly of one another, in all their exchanges, we clearly hear of Jesus' messiah status:

John says I am not worthy to carry his sandals.... (Matt 3:11)

Jesus says none born of woman is greater than he (Matt 11:11)

John says "I must decrease and he must increase (Jn 3:30)

Jesus says "He is Elijah if you are willing to accept" Matt 11:14)

There seemed to be an earlier showdown episode in Matt 3:14-15 (like Abbot and Costello's "Who's on first?", when Jesus presented Himself for John's baptism, and John hesitates, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?" There

Jesus, answers, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Fulfilled! So, it is all there! John is the precursor, the opening act and Jesus closes and seals the deal.

But, apparently there were some disciples of John still clinging to him. That is admirable, but it is holding them back and perhaps even holding back the full-on ministry of Jesus. So, prison gives John the occasion to make a final transfer of disciples to Jesus. John, knows that if he can set up the meet, and make the introduction, getting them all in the same room together, those ‘hangers-on’ will know-discover for themselves, that Jesus is the ONE! Maybe a sense of loyalty has them holding on to John, “We don’t want to leave you...” (like a scene from an old war movie: when a soldier is down & can’t go on, holding the group up, until the immobile soldier commands, “Go on, we all can’t get out- you must finish the mission-forward!”

I hear John saying, “Jesus is the mission” He is why I came! John is handing over his disciples to Jesus’ service. In Jesus, the kingdom’s come, the kingdom that John preached, was coming!

And I love Jesus’ response to the question “Are you it?” Jesus basically offers a version of ‘Come follow me’ by saying “Come take a look-What do you see and hear?” Jesus is saying, “Come watch, live with me and see. My work is my word.” He spells out by His actions what He brings. It is the work plan of His mission statement (announced in his hometown synagogue of Nazareth I Luke 4:18-19 or laid out in His teaching of Beatitudes Matt 5:1-12) The blind to see, the lame walk again, the deaf hear, the dead raised, lepers healed and the poor receive Good News (*Prophecy of Isaiah 29:18-19, 61:1*)

And Advent offers us that time of fulfillment and calls us to help the transition to Christ’s coming again, by ourselves helping open others’ eyes to see new things or see things newly (new perspective), to walk lighter as we help them carry their burdens, to sing new songs of hope – fresh words people long to hear, like the good news to the poor, positive news of uplifting stories, maybe not literal miracles but certainly prophecies fulfilled that announce Jesus’ Presence again in our world.