

"The Joy of Bearing Fruit"

I want to remind you that during the season of Advent we are waiting and preparing for the day when Jesus comes again in power and great glory.

- Just 2 weeks ago we lit the first Advent candle - the purple candle that represents "hope." It symbolizes our hope for God's coming again. *"The great day of the LORD is near – near, and coming quickly. Listen!"* according to the Prophet Zephaniah 1:14.
- Last Sunday – the Second Sunday of Advent, we lit another purple candle, the "Peace" candle. It was an amazing day – when five young people committed themselves to Jesus and received Holy Confirmation. Three adults re-affirmed that same commitment – before Bishop Neil. What a special day it was!
- This morning, we lit the Rose-Colored Candle. Many think it is pink, but officially it is Rose – according to the Liturgical calendar – it is the "Joy" candle.
- Next Sunday, we will light the last purple candle – the candle of "Love." *Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.* You will see that on Christmas Eve we will replace all of them with white candles and light a large white candle in the center – the Christ Candle – the Christmas Candle. What a wonderful time it will be at our 5:30 and 11 PM services. We will line our walk with luminaries to line your way to come home for Christmas.

The season of Advent gives us four weeks to think about where we are in God's creation of things. Advent is supposed to be the time when we, as individuals, as members of the Body of Christ, look at ourselves in the mirror. We should look at that reflection of ourselves and consider what our place is within this large and wonderful family – the Body of Christ. *"Hope, Peace, Joy and Love."* If you are not sure – we know someone who is and who does – all you need to do is just ask Jesus to show you! Yes, Jesus loves you – the Bible tells you so!

In today's Holy Gospel in Luke 3:7-8 John the Baptizer boldly told them *"You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham"* John the Baptist was not paying these religious leaders a compliment. Vipers are not friendly – and their young are born inside their mothers and eat their way out. He was telling these people plain and simple - it is about who you believe in – not who you are related to! You need to bear fruit!

John's words penetrated right into the heart of the sinner and brought them to their knees in repentance. That kind of preaching and power only comes through the power of the Holy Spirit! Of course not everyone who heard him would repent. Many would walk away still lost in their sin. Many would need his message; they would turn away from their behavior and repent and then allow John to baptize them in the River Jordan. God had him baptize so many that he became known as John the Baptizer or John the Baptist.

Third Sunday of Advent, December 12, 2021, Year C

I have been thinking - what good does it do for any of us to say that “Jesus is the Reason for the Season,” unless we really recognize that sin and salvation are the reasons for Jesus’ coming and becoming a person in the first place? Slogans are wonderful, but we have got to know why He came in the first place. He came because of you and me. It was personal. The message of repentance for sin and salvation from sin needs to be heard – and that each one of us – all of mankind is truly in need of a Savior. To be rescued from ourselves! Unfortunately, there are some who believe that they have no need of any help, they don’t need a Savior! Honestly, we should be doing the same thing that John the Baptist did, “PROCLAIMING THE COMING OF THE LORD TO A WORLD LOST IN SIN!” John was called to be getting the Word out!

The Greek word for getting the Word out is κηρύσσω (kerusso). It means “proclaiming, or preaching” – living God’s Word so that others can benefit from our efforts. St. Francis of Assisi is credited with saying “preach the Gospel always, and if necessary – use words!” You don’t have to stand on a street corner, making a whole bunch of noise, instead you could be standing in front of a kettle in front of Belk’s, ringing the bell and saying, “Merry Christmas and God bless you!” Actions speak louder than words. John the Baptist preached in the wilderness and you and I are in a wilderness today too. That might change somebody’s frozen heart this Christmas season. Unbelievable. John the Baptist preached in the wilderness and you and I are in the wilderness today. We live in a fallen world with people who are looking for something, who are broken, who are hurting, – and that something that they are looking for has a Name. His Name is Jesus, Yeshua. How we respond makes all the difference.

John preached about the coming harvest of men’s souls and that message is just as real today as it was then. John said that Jesus was coming - the Master builder, the Chief Cornerstone, the very Son of God, who had all power in Heaven and in Earth, and He was coming for a purpose. John proclaimed the truth in the Gospel of John 1:29 “*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” The whole world!

The Gospel of Matthew in chapter 3 gives us the same view of John the Baptist that Luke wrote about, warning the Pharisees and Sadducees. He went on to say “*The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*” (Matthew 3:10-11) John was truly an inspired man who loved to proclaim, (Kerusso κηρύσσω) “*the one who is more powerful than I*” and that He was coming soon. You might be saying – 2,000 years – where is he? What was it St. Peter said, “*a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day*”? (2 Peter 3:8) He will come in God’s time! We just need to be patient. We will either be here when He comes or we will be coming back with Him to proclaim His glory.

You might recall that the pregnant Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea, right near Jerusalem. They lived in Jerusalem because John’s father, Elizabeth’s

Third Sunday of Advent, December 12, 2021, Year C

husband, Zechariah was a priest in the Temple. So they had to live nearby. Just like me in Douglas. I don't live an hour away. What good would that be. So they were right near Jerusalem, in the hill country and Mary came to visit. Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John, who would be called the Baptist. When Mary entered and *"Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!'"* (Luke 1:41-42) Some translations read this: *"Blessed is the fruit of your womb!"* I looked at the original Greek transcript and sure enough there it was – 'καρπὸς' - the Greek word for fruit. Fruit is such an important by-product of efforts and blessings to others. How is your Karpos?

John the Baptizer's words in today's Holy Gospel – he said, *"The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."* (Luke 3:9) Jesus also had something to say about what He expects when He comes again: *"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."* (Matthew 7:16-20) And so I ask you one more time – how is your Karpos? Are you bearing good fruit? Jesus later said in the Gospel of John: *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* (John 15:5)

The measure of each of our lives is the fruit. Jesus wants each one of us to be recognized and to be encouraged and follow His instructions, knowing that: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last."* (John 15:16)