

Second Sunday of Advent, December 8, 2019, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA:

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-12

"Come Lord Jesus, Come"

John the Baptist is sometimes called the forerunner to Jesus because God sent him ahead of Jesus, as a herald to let the people know that the true Messiah had come, and to call the people to respond – that they would be preparing their hearts to be ready to accept His message.

John the Baptist was kind of a 'different' person. He dressed differently than most people, and certainly ate differently than most other people, but had a message only God could bless. John was the son of Zechariah, who was of the tribe of Levi, and a priest of the Temple in Jerusalem. Elizabeth was his wife and she was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In Luke 1:36-37, we learn this about her that she was *"going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."* Jesus said that John had come to fulfill these words from Malachi 4:5, *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes"* when He said in Matthew 11:13-14, *"For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come."* There is more important background information for us to know about Elizabeth and Zechariah. They were BOTH from the priestly line of Levi. Why is that important? Elizabeth's relative, Mary was probably also from that priestly line – a holy line, designed by God to be a priesthood. Jesus therefore came not only from the priestly line, but from the Heavenly Father.

John began his ministry in the 15th year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberias Caesar, roughly 25 or 26 AD. He had been practicing his ministry long before Jesus came into His ministry at the age of thirty. John's message was for Israel to turn back to God, because the Messiah has at long last arrived, bringing the Kingdom of God with Him. It is truly special that John the Baptist is inspired by God to identify Jesus as the Lamb of God in John 1:29, when he said, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* Many of John's followers later became disciples of Jesus because John made it clear to them that his job was simply to prepare the way for God's Messiah.

John's preaching was incredible and attracted large crowds, and he was apparently quite popular. People were paying attention, and so many people came to be baptized by him. John's leadership had great influence and the people seemed ready to do anything that he would ask them to do.

John was at the peak of his popularity when he baptized Jesus, in the Jordan river, and proclaimed Him to be the Messiah. Then, with his mission accomplished of preparing the way, he told his followers about Jesus. The Apostle Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, and so was John the Apostle. Andrew, who after meeting Jesus just had to tell his brother, Peter. John had awakened the nation, and presented to them the Son of God, the Lamb of God. His work was done. Jesus said that Malachi had preached, and then there was no identifiable prophet until John the Baptist. That is about 600 years, so the Nation of Israel was sort of in a

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coma or 'blackout' – they didn't hear anything from God – no word from God coming. So when John the Baptist came – he woke them up – many of them.

In today's Holy Gospel, John gives more information about the Messiah, as he says, "*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. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*" (Matthew 3:11-12)

This is an exciting message for all those preparing for the Messiah, with penitent hearts, but there is a message of warning here for the leaders of the Temple – who as we later learn, will not receive Jesus as the Messiah. The message is subtle, as John speaks of the threshing floor. I believe that this is VERY important!

The Angel of the Lord told David that he was to purchase the threshing floor that belonged to "*Araunah the Jebusite*" (2 Samuel 24:18) David was to buy the land on which Abraham took Isaac to sacrifice him. It was this land that David bought, but was not allowed to build on, because of his sin with Bathsheba and the murdering of her husband Uriah the Hittite. And so according to 2 Chronicles 3:1, "*then Solomon began to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.*" In essence by John talking about "*Jesus clearing his threshing floor,*" I believe it was a foreboding for the leadership of the Temple, the Pharisees and Sadducees, that things would not be "business as usual" with Jesus, and He would call them and their actions – pointing out what was truly important to God – but also pointing out the things that were merely just tradition. They would not like that one bit! The message is – prepare your heart for the Lord.

Last week, Deacon Diane reminded us about the Season of Advent and some things we should consider doing to prepare our hearts and minds for the Lord – both in celebration of His birth and getting ready for His coming again. Consider this: The Creator of the universe gives up His throne. He is the King and can have anything He wants but He comes as a baby – depending on the care of others for a time in His life. You and I both know that babies have to rely on the care of others. They cry and we jump; they want food and we feed them; they want to play – we also jump. We take care of them to make sure that they grow, and nourish, and flourish. I think that it is really important and it really hits home for me, and so we remember that He is called Emmanuel, as the angel told Mary – God with us – in so many ways. We need to remember what He did, not only the sacrifice on the cross, but the incredible sacrifice of being humbled enough to do all of the things that we do, including to get hungry, laugh, and even cry. Advent prepares us to welcome the arrival of God - The Teacher - who by example showed us how He would like us to live. How we should share His love between our Lord God and ourselves, and between you and me; between our neighbors and ourselves.

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Today is the Second Sunday of Advent and we lit a second purple candle, the “Peace” candle. I can’t help but think of Jesus appearing to the Apostles in the Upper Room, and said “*peace be with you.*” (John 20:19) Peace – or in Hebrew - Shalom! Next week we will light the Rose-Colored Candle. It may look pink, but the official church term is Rose – according to the Liturgical calendar – that is available in the back of the church. The Rose-colored candle is the “Joy” candle. Then on the last Sunday of Advent, the last purple candle is lit – the candle of “Love.” Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Those are four reminders of how we can prepare our hearts for the King.

The reading today, from the Prophet Isaiah, gives us an incredible look at the peace to come in the Kingdom of God. It is a peace that is hard to understand, or to comprehend. It is a peace that is unlike anything we know today. He writes, “*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.*” (Isaiah 11:6-8) It is a picture of a peace that only Jesus, the King can bring – and will bring. Come Lord, Jesus, Come! As we prepare for His birth, and for His coming again.