



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Advent (B)
December 13, 2020

John's Joyful Preaching

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Why go into the desert and cry out? The voice in the desert is lonesome, heard only by those who go there to listen. Let's leave our routines, go into the spiritual deserts of our hearts, and listen today.

The words of preparation John preaches are joyful. Why? First, to be told you are on the wrong path is good news. Have you ever followed your GPS to the wrong place because of an address typo? "It would have been nice to know this before I traveled across town to the wrong place," you thought.

Second, it is joyful to be told what makes your beloved happy, because you then know what will please him or her.

Good news! John's preaching points us to our destination in Jesus and to what makes him happy. The rose vestments worn by our priests today symbolize that joy. Notice in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco titled *Prophet Isaiah*, the prophet is wearing that color, too.

Another interesting detail is that Isaiah is holding his finger in the book while looking back at a young cherub, who in turn points to his neighbor. Isaiah's finger is in the Gospels, where he is the most quoted prophet of the Old Testament. Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, and John the Baptist quotes Isaiah's prophesy about "the voice crying out in the desert."

Perhaps the cherub behind Isaiah is John the Baptist. And perhaps the barely visible baby to whom the little John the Baptist is pointing represents Christ, the reason for our joy. +

A Word from Pope Francis

Anxieties, difficulties, and sufferings permeate our lives, and so many times the reality around us seems to be inhospitable and arid, like the desert....But the words of [John] the Baptist reveal that our joy rests on the certainty that this desert is inhabited: "Among you there is one whom you do not know."

—Angelus, Gaudete Sunday, December 17, 2017



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

I will rejoice heartily in the LORD,
my being exults in my God.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always.
Pray without ceasing.

John 1:6-8, 19-28

[John the Baptist said,] "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

*Let's leave our routines,
go into the spiritual
deserts of our hearts,
and listen today.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What makes you joyful? Would those same things make Jesus joyful, too?
- Do I point people toward the true source of joy with my words and example?

Celebrate the Incarnation

By Kathleen M. Basi

Soon after I met my husband, I began experiencing paralyzing anxiety. Was he or was he not the one God meant for me to marry? I was terrified of misinterpreting God's will, yet I was too afraid of hearing an unwelcome answer to ask for help. So, it went on for four years. Thankfully, once we were married, that particular fear resolved itself.

Nonetheless, to this day, severe anxiety still crops up occasionally. The trigger is always different—infertility, insomnia, professional concerns—but the symptoms are the same: my heart pounds, my brain fixates on *what-if* questions, and my chest tightens to the point that I find it difficult to even draw a deep breath. Anxiety consumes my thoughts and spoils the enjoyment of everyday life. And then...in the midst of this darkness, sometimes, I find relief in thinking: *by becoming human, Jesus sanctified even this plague of humankind.*

Sometimes we forget how relevant the celebration of the Incarnation is to our faith.

At this time of year, our senses are filled with the celebration of the Incarnation—God becoming a human being. Stories of stables, shepherds, and angels remind us that God is with us. Yet



sometimes, we forget just how relevant this tenet of faith really is.

When God took on human flesh, he accepted the whole works, including human imperfections. Jesus could have stayed up in heaven to hang out with the choirs of angels. Instead, he came down and got his hands dirty. He took on everything but sin, and for that reason, the entire human experience has been made holy—even the difficult parts.

It's in the Garden of Gethsemane that I see this most clearly. Jesus' prayer rings so true: *Please don't make me go through this. You know I want to do your will, God—but is this really it?* To be fully human is to know uncertainty and feelings of abandonment. It's a

lonely place to inhabit, and seemingly reassuring Scripture can sometimes have the opposite effect. Philippians 4:6–7 says, “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Such passages as these can actually feed the *what-if* questions: What if I'm mired in this darkness because my faith isn't strong enough to lift me above it?

We're not alone, though. Jesus experienced terror and uncertainty, too. He walked a similar path of darkness right to the cross. And because he did, there's light in times of darkness—right here, right in the middle of the mire. And while knowing that doesn't take away my anxiety, it does help me get through it. +

PRAYER

Lord, you are the source of my strength, peace, and joy. Send your Spirit to renew my trust and hope in you and give me peace.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 14–19

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Nm 24:2–7, 15–17a / Mt 21:23–27

Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Zep 3:1–2, 9–13 / Mt 21:28–32

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Is 45:6c–8, 18, 21c–25 / Lk 7:18b–23

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Gn 49:2, 8–10 / Mt 1:1–17

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Jer 23:5–8 / Mt 1:18–25

Saturday, Advent Weekday:
Jgs 13:2–7, 24–25a / Lk 1:5–25

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