

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 4, 2016

ENCOUNTERING CHRIST'S WORD



Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea (and) saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:

"A voice of one crying out in the desert,

'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'"

John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers!

Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.

And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'

For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals.

He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

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BACKGROUND ON THE GOSPEL READING

In this week's Gospel Reading and next week's, our Advent preparation for Christmas invites us to consider John the Baptist and his relationship to Jesus. In this week's Gospel, Matthew describes the work and preaching of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist appears in the tradition of the great prophets of Israel, preaching repentance and reform to the people of Israel. In fact, the description of John found in this reading is reminiscent of the description of the prophet Elijah ([2 Kings 1:8](#)). In this reading, John directs a particularly pointed call to repentance to the Pharisees and Sadducees, parties within the Jewish community of the first century.

John marks the conversion of those who seek him out with a baptism of repentance. Other groups in this period are thought to have practiced ritual washings for similar purposes, and John's baptism may have been related to the practices of the Essenes, a Jewish sect of the first century. John's baptism can be understood as an anticipation of Christian baptism. In this passage, John himself alludes to the difference between his baptism and the one yet to come: "I am baptizing you with water, for repentance . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11).

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In this reading, John makes very clear that his relationship to the Messiah yet to come (Jesus) is one of service and subservience: “. . . the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals” (Matthew 3:11). In the context of Matthew's Gospel, today's passage is followed by Jesus' baptism by John, an event that is attested to in all four of the Gospels and appears to have been the start of Jesus' public ministry.

John's preaching of the coming of the Lord is a key theme of the Advent season. As John's message prepared the way for Jesus in the first century, we, too, are called to prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming. We respond to John's message by our repentance and reform of our lives. We are also called to be prophets of Christ, who announce by our lives, as John did, the coming of the Lord.

LASALLIAN VALUE IN ACTION

We are called to be Christians...

We are called to proclaim Christ in our lives.

Sources:

www.usccb.org

www.loyolapress.com

www.dailygospel.org