

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say,
rejoice.
Indeed, the Lord is near.

COLLECT

O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray,
to attain the joys of so great a salvation
and to celebrate them always
with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Is 35:1-6.10

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Let the wilderness and the dry-lands exult,
let the wasteland rejoice and bloom,
let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil,
let it rejoice and sing for joy.
The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they shall see the glory of the Lord,
the splendour of our God.
Strengthen all weary hands,
steady all trembling knees
and say to all faint hearts,
"Courage! Do not be afraid.
"Look your God is coming,
vengeance is coming,
the retribution of God;
he is coming to save you."
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
the ears of the deaf unsealed,
then the lame shall leap like a deer
and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy,
for those the Lord has ransomed shall return.
They will come to Zion shouting for joy,
everlasting joy in their faces;
joy and gladness will go with them
and sorrow and lament be ended.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

RESP. PSALM

Ps 145:6-10

Response:

Come, Lord, and save us.

1. It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever,
who is just to those who are oppressed.
It is he who gives bread to the hungry,
the Lord, who sets prisoners free. (R.)
2. It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind,
who raises up those who are bowed
down,
the Lord, who protects the stranger
and upholds the widow and orphan. (R.)
3. It is the Lord who loves the just
but thwarts the path of the wicked.
The Lord will reign for ever,
Zion's God, from age to age. (R.)

SECOND READING

Jm 5:7-10

A reading from the letter of St James.

Be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming.
Think of a farmer: how
patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the
ground until it has had the

autumn rains and the spring rains! You too
have to be patient; do not lose
heart, because the Lord's coming will be
soon. Do not make complaints
against one another, brothers, so as not to be
brought to judgement
yourselves; the Judge is already to be seen
waiting at the gates. For your
example, brothers, in submitting with
patience, take the prophets who spoke
in the name of the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia! alleluia!

**The spirit of the Lord has been given to me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the
poor. Alleluia!**

GOSPEL

Mt 11:2-11

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Matthew.

John in his prison had heard what Christ was
doing and he sent his disciples
to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come,
or have we got to wait for
someone else?" Jesus answered, "Go back
and tell John what you hear and see;
the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers
are cleansed, and the deaf
hear, and the dead are raised to life and the
Good News is proclaimed to the
poor; and happy is the man who does not
lose faith in me."

As the messengers were leaving, Jesus
began to talk to the people about
John: "What did you go out into the
wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the
breeze? No? Then what did you go out to
see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh
no, those who wear fine clothes are to be
found in palaces. Then what did you go out
for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and
much more than a prophet: he is the one
of whom scripture says: Look, I am going
to send my messenger before you; he will
prepare your way before you. I tell you
solemnly, of all the children born of women,
a greater than John the Baptist has never
been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of
heaven is greater than he is."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

**I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.**

**I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.**

For our sake he was crucified under

**Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.**

**He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.**

**I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins**

**and I look forward to the resurrection of
the dead and the life of the world to come.
Amen.**

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

May the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we
pray,
be offered to you unceasingly,
to complete what was begun in sacred
mystery
and powerfully accomplish for us your saving
work.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do
not fear.
Behold, our God will come, and he will save
us.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We implore your mercy, Lord,
that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of
our faults
and prepare us for the coming feasts.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE? MT 11: 2-11



Statue of Jesus and St John the Baptist in a New York church

One of the common criticisms of politicians is that they seldom, if ever, answer a question directly. In the gospel passage today, we see Jesus adopting a similar tactic by providing John the Baptist with the evidence of his ministry and implicitly inviting him to draw his own conclusion.

The signs of the arrival of the messianic age are there, including the Good News being proclaimed to the poor. Salvation is seen as the kingdom of heaven (as Matthew puts it) breaking into those situations in which human life is compromised or threatened, as in the case of illness. John does not seem to share in this new age: great as he is, he belongs to the past, and with the arrival of the one for whom he was preparing the way, he is about to fade from the scene.

We are told that John is now in prison. The reason given in the Gospels is that he had criticised Herod Antipas for marrying his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, and the dramatic and colourful story of the circumstances leading to John's execution is well known. But there is a perhaps more likely reason, and that is that John's preaching was having an effect on soldiers and tax-collectors, the very people on

whom Herod depended for enforcing his rule. John was probably regarded as becoming an alternative focus of influence and so perceived by Herod as a threat. Given Jesus' comparing the unbending Baptist with the reed swaying in the breeze, it is not difficult to appreciate Herod's attitude.

Whatever the historical facts, John's role in the Gospel is that of preparing the way, and with the arrival of Jesus, his task is accomplished. The signs that Jesus provides suggest that Jesus is the Messiah, but not of the military or political kind that many people were expecting or hoping for. Jesus' saying that happy is the person who does not lose faith in me may be a reflection of the mixed reception his preaching received: we also have to decide what we believe about who Jesus is, and Advent is the time to ponder that. ■

SAY

Happy is the person who does not lose faith in Jesus.

LEARN

Matthew is writing for a community with a large Jewish-Christian membership: that is why he uses expressions like kingdom of heaven rather than kingdom of God, to show respect by avoiding the use of the divine name.

The evangelist is more likely to be a convert scribe than a tax-collector.

The name Matthew is connected with the New Testament word for disciple.

The miracles are works of power and signs that the kingdom of God is breaking into human life.

DO

Take some time to say one of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary slowly and thoughtfully. Advent is the true Marian season in which Mary's place in God's plan for us is most prominent.

REFLECT

We would probably call John the Baptist today a fundamentalist. That would also be a fair description of most of the biblical prophets. Such an attitude includes a rather literal interpretation of the Word of God, a clear and definite idea of right and wrong and an intolerant view of people who hold other opinions. Jesus appears as much more understanding of human weakness. Some people say that religions are divided horizontally rather than vertically: this suggests that fundamentalist Catholics/Protestants/Jews/Muslims have more in common with each other than with their more liberal coreligionists. While it is a good thing to be committed wholeheartedly to one's beliefs, there is a danger that this can spill over into intolerance of those who do not share the same belief or even the same interpretation of that faith, and we can see today the dreadful effects of such an attitude in certain parts of the world. ■