

**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**

Isaiah 61:1-2.10-11

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,  
for the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to bring good news to the  
poor,  
to bind up hearts that are broken;  
to proclaim liberty to captives,  
freedom to those in prison;  
to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord.  
"I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices  
in my God,  
for he has clothed me in the garments of  
salvation,  
he has wrapped me in the cloak of integrity,  
like a bridegroom wearing his wreath,  
like a bride adorned in her jewels.  
'For as the earth makes fresh things grow,  
as a garden makes seeds spring up,  
so will the Lord make both integrity and  
praise  
spring up in the sight of nations."

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM**

Luke 1

Response:

**My soul rejoices in my God.**

1. My soul glorifies the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God, my saviour.  
He looks on his servant in her  
nothingness;  
henceforth all ages will call me blessed.  
(R.)
2. The Almighty works marvels for me.  
Holy his name!  
His mercy is from age to age,  
on those who fear him. (R.)
3. He fills the starving with good things,  
sends the rich away empty.  
He protects Israel, his servant,  
remembering his mercy. (R.)

**SECOND READING**

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the  
Thessalonians.

Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for  
all things give thanks to God, because this is  
what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus.  
Never try to suppress the Spirit or treat the  
gift of prophecy with contempt; think before  
you do anything - hold on to what is good  
and avoid every form of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfect  
and holy; and may you all be kept safe and  
blameless, spirit, soul and body, for the  
coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has  
called you and he will not fail you.

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**

John 1:6-8.19-28

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
John.

A man came, sent by God.

His name was John.

He came as a witness,  
as a witness to speak for the light,  
so that everyone might believe through him.  
He was not the light,  
only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness.

When the Jews

sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to

ask him, "Who are you?" he

not only declared, but he declared quite

openly, "I am not the

Christ." "Well then," they asked "are you

Elijah?" "I am not" he

said. "Are you the Prophet?" He answered,

"No." So they said to

him, Who are you? We must take back an

answer to those who

sent us. What have you to say about

yourself?" So John said, "I

am, as Isaiah prophesied:

a voice that cries in the wilderness:

Make a straight way for the Lord."

Now these men had been sent by the

Pharisees, and they put

this further question to him, "Why are you

baptising, if you are

not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the

prophet?" John

replied, "I baptise with water; but there

stands among you - unknown to you -

the one who is coming after me; and I am

not fit to undo his sandal-strap." This

happened at Bethany, on

the far side of the Jordan, where John was

baptising.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**THE APOSTLES' CREED**

**I believe in God,**

**the Father almighty,**

**Creator of heaven and earth,**

**and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,**

*(all bow during the next three lines)*

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**

**born of the Virgin Mary,**

**suffered under Pontius Pilate,**

**was crucified, died and was buried;**

**he descended into hell;**

**on the third day he rose again from the dead;**

**he ascended into heaven,**

**and is seated at the right hand of God the**

**Father almighty;**

**from there he will come to judge the living**

**and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,**  
**the holy catholic Church,**  
**the communion of saints,**  
**the forgiveness of sins,**  
**the resurrection of the body,**  
**and life everlasting.**  
**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.**

17 DECEMBER 2017

# Sunday Message

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year B • Season Colour: Rose (or Purple) • Psalter Week 3



## REJOICE!

In the gospel tradition, people are mentioned only in relation to Jesus. No-one appears in the narrative just for their own sake.

John the Baptist is an important figure in the Jesus story, and it is clear that many people thought that he might actually be the Messiah. In today's reading from the Fourth Gospel, John is presented as definitely subordinate to Jesus, as a witness whose function is to herald the arrival of the one who is the light. Neither the gospel of Mark nor the gospel of John contain what we call an *Infancy Narrative* which would explain to the other characters in the story (and to the later reader) exactly who Jesus is. Jesus appears on the scene as a fully-grown adult. Mark tells us in his opening sentence that Jesus is the *Son of God*: here John the Baptist is described as someone *sent by God as a witness to speak for the light*, who is the Word made flesh in the person of Jesus, as John tells us in the Prologue to his gospel.

We have today an echo of last week's gospel about the voice crying in the wilderness to make a straight way for the Lord, but the emphasis here is on the Baptist as the witness, rather than his preaching. As Jesus grows in importance, the Baptist gradually fades from the scene, his task in preparing the way is over. The same goes for all the scenes in the gospel story: even if Jesus is not present, we should ask ourselves, *What does this tell us about Jesus?* If we become absorbed in other characters or issues, then we are missing the point which the evangelist wants us to consider. ■

### LEARN

In medieval Christmas carols, the message of the Cross is always present: there is theology, not sentimentality in their poetry (for instance, *The Holly and the Ivy*).

In the Fourth Gospel, *the Jews* is a technical term for the Jewish leaders who are hostile to Jesus: it does not apply to the Jewish people as a whole.

The *Infancy Narratives* comprise the material found in the first two chapters of the Gospel according to Matthew and Luke respectively.

The word for *witness* in Greek is *martyr*: we use the word martyr to describe someone who witnesses to their belief to the extent of giving their life.

### REFLECT

Most people would not consider John the Baptist an attractive figure: he is very much a fundamentalist, in the line of most of the prophets in the history of Israel. There is little, if any, popular devotion to him. Later in the Gospel of John, he declares that Jesus *must increase, I must decrease*. He sends his own disciples to follow Jesus then disappears from the story. Perhaps during this time of Advent we might reflect on the figure of John the Baptist, as someone who realised what his part in God's plan was and fulfilled it. John the evangelist portrays him as self-effacing, leaving the stage when

his part in the drama was over. As we enter the last two weeks of Advent, our lives are probably becoming cluttered with all sorts of distractions, and even our prayer life can become deflected away from the real meaning of the feast which is approaching. The great danger to our understanding the true meaning of Christmas is *sentimentality*, which is encouraged by many of our traditional Christmas carols. In Advent, the scriptures at Mass help us to consider what this feast means in an adult way, because to be a disciple of Jesus is an adult decision, and to live as a disciple of Jesus is an adult way of life, assisted by the Holy Spirit whom we received at Baptism. ■

### SAY

**The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me.**

### DO

Make the sign of the cross with holy water and reflect on your being a baptized Christian. You have a place in God's plan which only you can fulfil. Be grateful and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit.