

Pastor Joe Polzin
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
“Rejoice! Jesus Comes to Us”
Year B – Third Sunday in Advent
December 13, 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

It’s in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 4, where we hear about Jesus’ very first sermon in his earthly ministry. Jesus arrives at his hometown of Nazareth and he goes to worship at his local synagogue. And when it was time for the reading of Scripture, much like we have today in our worship services, Jesus was the one who stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled it, and he looked very specifically for certain passage, for our Old Testament Reading today, Isaiah chapter 61 [although they didn’t have chapter numbers as we have].

And this is what he read: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down to deliver his sermon. And Luke describes this scene in such a riveting way—“The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him” (4:20). You can just picture it. Everyone straining to hear what Jesus had to say. The anticipation was heavy in the air.

And Jesus says, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21). Think about that. This promise from Isaiah of a Messiah who was coming, and all that he would bring, this promise for which the people of Israel had been waiting for centuries, waiting for deliverance, and Jesus says that the time is *now*. The promise has been fulfilled in that room. And Jesus was the one who fulfills it.

Now, Luke goes on to tell us there were mixed reactions to this sermon. Some were marveling at Jesus’ gracious words, but others were confused, and asked, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” You see, they all knew Jesus. This was his hometown, after all. They had seen him grow up. They knew his parents. Jesus was the neighborhood kid. How could Jesus say that he had *anything* to do with this Messianic prophecy from Isaiah? They couldn’t understand who Jesus truly was, and what his arrival actually meant for them. Many chose, therefore, to overlook him at that point, and ignore what he had to say.

This church season of Advent is now more than half over. I’m still coming to grips with the fact that Advent is here, not to mention that Christmas is less than two weeks away. Even in 2020, these days are busy. And time goes quickly. And if we aren’t careful, we’ll miss what our Lord is saying to us today. We’ll miss what our Lord is saying about who he is, and what his arrival means for us.

This third Sunday in Advent, we are blessed to hear also from John the Baptist, who came to bear witness to the light of the world, that all might believe through him (John 1:7). John is the “voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (1:23). He points us to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He points us this and every Advent season to Jesus, the one who is coming. Because in Advent, we prepare for the Messiah to arrive.

However, when the expected Messiah does arrive, do we end up overlooking him, much like the people of Nazareth did? This busy season of Advent, are we paying any attention to the words of John the Baptist or the words of Jesus himself? Or are we too caught up with all that is happening in our own lives, and all that is going on with our own schedules? Are we listening to what Jesus says to us about himself? Or do we simply settle for whatever it is we want to say?

This world actually has much to say about Jesus, about who they think he is. It all started back in Nazareth with, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” It’s a refusal to listen to what Jesus is telling us about himself, specifically that he has come in fulfillment of the Scriptures in order to set his people free. Instead, for this world, Jesus is open to many different interpretations. Each person feels entitled to make their own assumptions about who they think Jesus is.

Some say he was only a man, only a son of Joseph. Any claim he supposedly makes about being the Son of God, the Messiah and Savior of the world, well, that’s just an exaggeration by the neighborhood kid who has a God complex. And so, it provides them the excuse to dismiss him. It provides them with the opportunity to keep living their life the way they want it.

Others say that Jesus was at least a good, moral role model for us, teaching peace and love, and providing us an example by which we can shape our lives. That he’s simply one of many good voices we can listen to in order to achieve a fulfilling life. But that only offers us a pep-talk-type Jesus, one who expects you do something about your life, but not a Savior who has come to do anything for you.

Still others are simply apathetic about Jesus. They refuse to consider him and they end up overlooking him. They will only go so far as to admit that Jesus is a person who has a holiday named after him, and not think much else beyond that. They’ll happily take their holiday celebrations, their paid vacation day, the fun and sentimentality this season brings, maybe even attend a Christmas Eve service. But then they move on, and simply wait for another year to start. Who Jesus actually is has become completely inconsequential to their lives.

But when you stop and listen to what Jesus says about himself, what he claims that day in the synagogue in Nazareth, any person’s response can only truly be one of two things. Either you believe him, or you don’t. Either Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing by the arrival of Jesus, or it isn’t. Either he is the Messiah sent to be the Savior of the world, or he’s not. Either he is the Son of God who we anticipate in Advent and celebrate at Christmas, or he’s not.

There is no middle ground. There is no justifiable apathetic response. Even if many choose to overlook him, like they did in his own hometown way back when, and make no attempt to determine whether he’s more than simply “Joseph’s son,” living as if he doesn’t matter is not something that anyone can actually afford to do.

We can’t afford to put off the fact that he is the Son promised from heaven by an angel to both Joseph and Mary. That he’s Mary’s son *and* he’s the Son of God. That he is the Word made flesh, the second person of the Trinity, the one begotten of his Father before all worlds, being of one substance with the Father from eternity, who descended to us and was incarnate, made man, who suffered Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, and the third day rose again.

Today, what we hear from Isaiah and from Jesus himself, is that this man and this God, this God-man, is the one who came into our world, a world that was lost in its captivity to sin. We were bound in chains by the curse of sin and our slavery to death and its darkness. But as our Gospel Reading says, when Christ came, he was the light who scattered the darkness.

Jesus is the one anointed one, the Christ, who brings good news to the poor, who binds up the brokenhearted, who proclaims liberty to the captives, who opens the prisons to those who are

bound, who proclaims the year of the Lord's favor, and who comforts all who mourn (Isaiah 61:1-2). *This* is who Jesus actually is.

And because Jesus has come to open the prison of sin by his death on the cross, and to bind up and heal our brokenness by his rising again, we are the full recipients of his saving work. We hear again this day how the Messiah has come for our eternal benefit. And during Advent, we recognize we are also preparing for the day when he will come again, to finally put to an end all that separates us from him. That is what his arrival, both at Christmas, and again on the Last Day, means to us.

And in the meantime, in between his first and his second coming, let us not overlook the ways that he comes to us right now. Although he did ascend into heaven, he hasn't left us alone. Even in the midst of this busy season and in the busyness of our lives, let us not overlook the fact that Christ is here among us as we gather.

He first arrived for us in our Baptism. We hear his voice in his Word, his continual speaking to us. He gives himself to us in his Holy Supper for the forgiveness of our sins. He strengthens our faith and sustains us until the day when he will come again. The day when we, too, will have a Nazareth moment, witnessing the fulfillment of Scripture before our very eyes, and seeing Jesus for who he truly is.

And because of who Jesus is, and what his arrival means for us, today we can see how Isaiah's words are fulfilled in our hearing right now. And, on this third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday, when we light the third candle, the candle of joy, we can echo Isaiah's words, "I will greatly *rejoice* in the Lord; my soul shall *exult* in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (61:10). In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. **Amen.**