

Advent 3C (12/13/09 – Rejoicing in *The Coming One*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Some have found John's question quite puzzling: *Are You the One Who is to come, or shall we look for another?* [LK 7.19] After all, isn't John the Baptizer the very one who was sent by God to proclaim Christ as ***The Coming One***? That's what Jesus says to the multitudes after He has responded to John's disciples sent to ask Him John's question: *What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You."* [LK 7.26-27] John – as we heard last week – was the last, great, Old Testament prophet ... indeed, the greatest. John preached Christ's coming. John humbled himself before his Lord and gave way to Him, saying: *He Who comes after me, the strap of Whose sandal I am not worthy to untie* [JN 1.27] and *He must increase, but I must decrease* [JN 3.30]. John released his own disciples and sent them to Christ, pointing Him out as ***The Coming One*** saying: *Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world* [JN 1.29]. And if we read a little further in JOHN's *Gospel*, it becomes all the more puzzling – John's question:

³⁰ *"This is He of Whom I said, 'After me comes a Man Who ranks before me, because He was before me.'* ³¹ *I myself did not know Him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that He might be revealed to Israel."* ³² *And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him.* ³³ *I myself did not know Him, but He Who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on Whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'* ³⁴ *And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."* [JN 1.30-34]

So ... how is it that John now questions Who Jesus is? ... asking through two of his disciples if He is ***The Coming One***?

But think about it a moment. Isn't that precisely the way we are? After all, we are *greater than he* – greater than John – Jesus says [LK 7.28]. Even though *among those born of women* (naturally) none is *greater than John*. We are *greater than he* because at the very least – though perhaps

also at the very most – we are *least in the Kingdom of God*. We are baptized children of God – believers. *I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.* That’s what our Lord says. And yet, do we not also – daily – doubt God? Don’t we wonder if He really loves us ... really cares for us ... really has forgiven us all our sins ... and really will give us what He promises in His Word? At least in some ways we wonder – at the very least our thoughts, words, and deeds **indicate** that we **must** wonder. Otherwise why would be sin like we do ... why would we ever fall into despair like we do ... why would we so often live as if Christ had not come ... is not here in our midst ... and will not come again to judge sin and unbelief? The very fact that we sin so often – daily ... indeed, several times a day – reveals that we have just as much difficulty as John did in believing and living the reality of Christ.

And when we look at John’s situation ... well, that also makes it easier to understand his doubting and his question. John is in prison. He has been placed there by Herod for the very reason that he spoke the truth – because he had condemned sin ... exhorted repentance ... and pointed to *The Coming One* (Jesus of Nazareth) as the **only** way of forgiveness, life, and salvation. John is in prison – and he is going to lose his head – for proclaiming the truth ... both Law and Gospel. John is suffering **precisely** because he has been the relentless, **faithful** messenger who went before the face of *The Coming One* to prepare His way for Him.

So we should be able to understand how John feels. How often have we doubted the Lord? How many times have we despaired because, despite doing what the Lord has commanded – what seemed to be the will of God – we found ourselves in a difficult ... painful ... rejected ... hopeless situation? We want things to go right in our lives. If we sin ... well, we can understand that things might go wrong – they should! But when we do right ... and follow the Lord ... and things go wrong – we suffer or are punished? That’s just not right! And it is at just such a time that **we** fall into the same thing that John is experiencing here: doubt ... despair ... unbelief – **sin!**

But Jesus **IS** *The Coming One* – as He reveals to us and the entire world in our *Holy Gospel* for this *Third Sunday in Advent*. Jesus is *The Coming*

One as His Words and works proclaim – not only by His teaching and miracles back then, but also ... and no less ... by His Word and Sacraments to this day ... until He comes again in glory. Jesus is the Anointed One ... the Messiah ... the Christ. He is *Immanuel* (God-with-us) in the flesh – Who comes to heal diseases ... Who comes to cast out evil spirits and to bestow His Holy Spirit ... Who comes to raise the dead, give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, and to preach the Gospel to the poor.

Jesus IS **The Coming One** – Who comes to take all your hurt and heartache upon Himself ... and to carry it away in His own Body to the Cross and to put it all to death and bury it forever. The Son of God comes to conquer sin, death, and hell for you ... and by His rising from the dead to open up heaven and to grant eternal life to you and me and all who believe in Him. He comes to obtain faith ... to make disciples ... to cleanse from sin ... to raise from death ... and to open up your ears and your heart to His saving Word of the Gospel.

Jesus IS **The Coming One** – Who comes to take away the judgments against you ... and to cancel *the record of debt that stood against you with its legal demands* ... by nailing them to the tree of His Cross in His Body [ZEP 3.15; COL 2.14]. Jesus comes to clear away your enemies – and you need never fear the evil one again. So ... as the prophet Zephaniah says in our *Old Testament Lesson* for this day:

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. ¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. ¹⁷ The LORD your God is in your midst, a Mighty One Who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing. [ZEP 3.14-17]

There is reason, indeed, to **Rejoice in The Coming One** ... since He comes to do so much on your behalf! Not just once upon a time ... but here and now ... today ... in this place! Are you imprisoned by your sin ... debilitated because of your sickness and weakness ... languishing because of

your afflictions in this life? Take heart ... indeed **Rejoice in The Coming One!** For He comes to you **today** with His Word – just as He once sent it to John to lift him up from his low estate into the very heavens. Your sin is forgiven ... your iniquity pardoned. Through the Word you have heard – read and proclaimed – Jesus sends you His Holy Spirit ... to work in your heart repentance over sin ... to assure you of your blessed status in His Kingdom ... and to cause you to rejoice in His coming.

Wise King Solomon – by divine inspiration – once wrote:

¹ For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ² a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ³ a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. [ECC 3.1-4]

This is basically what Jesus is getting at when He says: ***We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.*** [LK 7.32] There is a time to weep and mourn over your sin ... and the death you deserve because of it – that is, there is a time to repent. And there is a time to dance and laugh over the incredible goodness and mercy of the Lord to forgive your sin ... and give you His eternal life, which you don't deserve – that is, there is a time to rejoice in your salvation!

Today, in the midst of this season of preparation and repentance that is **Advent**, is the time to **Rejoice in The Coming One!** That is why the third candle of the **Advent** Wreath is pink – pink to represent joy ... pink for **Rejoicing in The Coming One!** In the midst of the humble repentance of **Advent** – characterized by St. John the Baptizer, who came ***eating no bread and drinking no wine*** [LK 7.33] ... while the world around us wants to party – we have a little taste of that never-ending time for rejoicing with Christ ... when we shall be blessed to eat and drink with Him in His Kingdom forever. Here, Christ our Lord comes to us ... and gives us His salvation ... His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins. Here is true reason for **Rejoicing in The Coming One** ... Jesus the Christ ... the Friend of sinners ... the Son of God ... Who eats with us and gives us eternal life!

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]