

## **December 15, 2018**

Isa 35:1-6a,10; Jas 5:7-10; Mt 11:2-11

In advent we are waiting expectantly for God's coming as a child in a manger at Christmas, waiting for the coming of the Lord at the end of time - and waiting for the coming of the Lord to each one of us. We have put on the color violet during this Advent time to help to represent the somber mood of waiting and preparing for the wonderful thing to come. Today we remind ourselves why we are waiting - we add a little bright white of joy to the violet of preparation. In the rose color of the vestments and the candle, we see this mixture of white and violet. We let ourself experience some joy yet still hold back a bit and continue to prepare.

Preparation for a guest to our house involves work. It involves a bit of cleaning, it means some planning and tasks that need to be done. We can be tempted to see the event of Jesus being born in Bethlehem as a distant event from 2000 years ago that maybe has some historical significance ... but what does it mean today? The event does have a significance in history, but also, and I would say more importantly, it has a significance to us in our lives today. In a couple of weeks or so the birth of Christ will become a present reality for us. How will we respond? This is a question that - like our rose vestments - can be filled with a mixture of joy, and also a sense that we still have some more work to do to prepare; an excitement of the guest to come, yet still with that lingering feeling that maybe we have forgotten to do something.

Our first reading speaks of this joy we're talking about: *Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you.* Jesus is coming, and not only to the world, but to each of us in some special way at Christmas - it's hard to remember that with everything else going on. The prophet is speaking about a savior coming. Not just someone coming to beat up your enemies, but God come to save in a new and transformative way. Maybe when we come face to face with the reality of Jesus we have a question similar to the one that John's disciples posed to Jesus: *Are you the one [I am looking for], or should [I] look for another?* Jesus' answer to the question in the Gospel - and to us - is to point back to the prophecy of Isaiah and show that he is the one foretold to come in a new and transformative way: *Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.*

Maybe you have been waiting for a long time to feel that the Lord has come to you. Know that a seed was planted in you years ago, and who knows - something may be ready to sprout this year. We heard in our second reading: *Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient.* James is saying that just like the farmer has to wait patiently for the plant to do its thing, we must wait patiently for the coming of the Lord. The seed within us is waiting for the rain. The more we water that seed the closer we get to reaping the fruits of that effort - the gifts and benefits that come from a closer connection to the Lord. To all who want the Lord's help and comfort in their lives, James says: *Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

Well how in the heck to we water that seed, how do we finish our preparation for the Lord to come in our lives? What do we have to do so that Christmas is not just another holiday, but rather a time when we can experience an encounter with Jesus? I'll suggest a few things we can do: First, focus attention on the reality of Jesus' presence in the world - this is not just a note in a history book, it is a reality that has continued. Don't worry about those who try to discredit the hidden present of God in the world today - have the faith like the faith of a little child on Christmas eve and believe in the mysterious, the hidden, the possible. Secondly, come to meet the Lord often in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of reconciliation. When your there have a spirit of quiet openness - rather than only mechanically going through the steps, let go of your cares, relax, and feel Jesus' presence. Third, try to see this Christmas time as a true opportunity to experience Jesus - no matter how long it has been since you have experienced him ... no matter if you can't remember ever experiencing Jesus.

You may have been touched by Jesus many times and just not recognized it. In the gospel we hear people who are looking Jesus right in the face ask him: *Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?* They had actually been encountering him - he was right there - but just didn't realize it. Can we open ourselves to joy at the possibilities of recognizing the presence of God in our lives. There is still a little time to water that seed of hope - time to wait patiently for Jesus to come into our lives with healing and cleansing, time to see that new growth in the Lord is possible. Let's feel that joy while we continue to prepare for a Christmas that has the possibility to be a powerful encounter with the Lord. This is a reason to Rejoice!