

4th Week of Advent. 12/23/2020

Preparing for the Lord

We have been waiting for the solemnity of Christmas. We have been thinking about the promises of a savior made by God in the Old Testament. We have been praying and preparing for the day of the Lord. Our wait is almost over, and everything points to Jesus.

This is the last day of Advent, as tomorrow evening we will be celebrating the birth of Christ. In this last day, we hear in the first reading from the last of the classical writing prophets. Malachi was one of the twelve minor prophets, who wrote after the Babylonian exile. He reminds the people of Israel that God is faithful to his promises. He instructs the people about the day of the Lord and the

coming of the Messiah. “Thus says the Lord God: I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me. I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes.”

500 years later, the prophetic words of Malachi are fulfilled in John the Baptist. An explicit connection is made to Malachi’s words when the arrival of John is announced by the Archangel Gabriel to Zachariah. Zachariah will have a son with his wife Elizabeth, and the child will be called John. John will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah. This is the one Malachi spoke about, the one who would prepare the way.

Today in the Gospel we contemplate the birth and naming of John the Baptist. People want to name him Zachariah as his father, but his parents say “no”, and they come up with the same name for the child: His name shall be John. There is joy, fear and wonder as they see Zachariah able to speak again, blessing the Lord.

The name John means “The Lord has shown favor.” In this son, the Lord showed favor to the old, righteous couple of Zachariah and Elizabeth who had prayed for a child, even though Elizabeth barren. In this child, the Lord showed favor to the people of Israel, remaining faithful to his promise of sending one who would prepare the way. And in the one who is greater than John, the Lord will show favor to all the nations of the earth, redeeming us from sin and restoring our relationship with God.

We have one more day in Advent. We have one more day to prepare for the solemnity of the birth of Christ. Maybe this Advent has been for us a special time of reflection, to make straight the path for the Lord in our lives. Maybe we took a hard look at our habits, and we went to confession. Or maybe we got distracted along the way and didn't do all that we thought we would. We have one more day. We can use it well by asking for the intercession and help of John the Baptist, who will help us to flatten the hills and to fill up the valleys in our lives, in preparation for the Lord.

Our communion antiphon today is from the book of Revelation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door to me, I will enter his house and dine with him". Let everything within us watch and wait, for the Lord our God draws near.