

They Shall Obtain Joy and Gladness

SUNDAY 11 DECEMBER 2022 GOSPEL READING: Matthew 11:2-11

2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 And blessed is he who takes no offense at me." 7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 Why then did you go out? To see a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, those who wear soft raiment are in kings' houses. 9 Why then did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you.' 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

SCRIPTURE READING: Isaiah 35:1-6a,10

1 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus 2 it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. 3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. 4 Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6 then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. 10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Meditation: Why did Jesus praise John the Baptist as the greatest person born of a woman and then in the same breath say that those who enter God's kingdom will be greater than John (Matthew 11:11)? John is the last and greatest of the prophets of the old covenant. He fulfilled the essential task of all the prophets - to be fingers pointing to Jesus Christ, God's Anointed Son and Messiah. John prepared the way for the Messiah and he pointed others to Jesus the Messiah at the River Jordan when he exclaimed, *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world* (John 1:29)

John saw from a distant what Jesus would accomplish through his death on the cross - our redemption from bondage to sin and death and our adoption as sons and daughters of God and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. When King Herod tried to silence John by throwing him into prison, John sent his disciples to Jesus after John had heard the reports about Jesus performing signs and wonders and speaking to people about the coming of God's kingdom. John wanted his disciples to hear and see firsthand what Jesus was doing to bring the kingdom of God to those who were receptive and ready to receive his message.

Jesus the Messiah performs the signs of God's kingdom power

Jesus confirmed for John that the miracles and healings which he performed were in direct fulfillment of the **Messianic prophecies announced by Isaiah some 700 years previously**. Isaiah had prophesied that when the Messiah would come to save his people he would "open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, the lame would leap, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy" (Isaiah 35:5). Jesus' miracles are a demonstration of the power of God's kingdom at work in the midst of his people. When God acts to save his people he turns their sorrow and weeping into joy and singing, and their fear and weakness into strength and hope.

The greatness of John's life and witness of the Messiah

When Jesus had answered the disciples of John, he in turn asked them a question. "Why did you go out in the wilderness to see John the Baptist?" "Did you go because you were hungry for the word of the Lord?" Jesus said that John was more than a spokesman for God. John was the faithful witness and friend of the bridegroom who pointed others to the coming of the Messiah in their midst. Jesus contrasted John with the image of a reed shaken by the wind. Unlike a reed which is weak and spineless and can be easily crushed or bruised, John stood as a pillar of strength and truth in the face of opposition and persecution. No demonic force could weaken or crush John in his unswerving trust in God and his word.

Jesus offers us abundant life and joy to be his witnesses

Jesus knew that what the Father in heaven had sent him to accomplish for our sake would supersede all that the prophets had done and foreseen in the past. Jesus' atoning death on the cross cancels the debt of our sins and sets us free to live as citizens of his kingdom. He gives us pardon, healing, and abundant life through his Holy Spirit, and the promise of unending joy with him in his everlasting kingdom.

John the Baptist paid the ultimate sacrifice of his life for speaking God's word and preparing the way for Jesus the Lord and Saviour of the world. The Lord Jesus offers us the same assurance of faith and the strength to stand against every force that would try to rob us of our conviction and courage to live and proclaim the *good news* (the *Gospel*) of God's kingdom. Do you know the joy, strength, and power which Jesus gives to everyone who puts their trust in him and the power of the Holy Spirit? Ask the Lord Jesus to increase your faith and hope in his promises for you.

Daily Quote from the Early Church Fathers: *John fulfills Elijah's prophetic ministry*, by John Chrysostom, 547-407 A.D.

"Jesus knew the mind of John who sent them, for he knew, as God knows, our inner thoughts. There he was, actively healing the blind, lame, and many others. He healed not to teach John, who was already convinced, but those who had come to him doubting. Having healed them he said, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.' And then he added pointedly, 'And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.' By saying this Jesus implied that he knew even his questioners' unuttered thoughts. For if he had said simply 'I am he' this would have fallen short of overcoming their unstated sense of being offended. And it would have given fuel to some Jews who were already saying to him, 'You bear record of yourself' (John 8:13). **Hence he answered nothing directly concerning his identity but left them to learn of it from the miracles**, freeing what he taught from suspicion and making it plainer. Then Jesus gently chided them for being silently offended in him. He made their case for them, leaving it to their own conscience alone to judge, calling no witness of his reprimand other than they themselves who knew what they had been thinking. For it was of their own inward offense that he was thinking when he said, 'Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.' In this way Christ drew them all the more closely to himself." (excerpt from *THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, HOMILY 36.2*)

OPENING PRAYER: - **Lord Jesus**, strengthen my trust in your word and my hope in the saving power of your kingdom. Free me from everything that would hold me back from pursuing your kingdom and your will for my life. **Amen**

CLOSING PRAYER: - **Lord, You invite all who are burdened to come to You.** Allow your healing hand to heal us. Touch our soul with Your compassion for others. Touch our hearts with Your courage and infinite love for all. Touch our minds with Your wisdom, that our mouths may always proclaim Your praise. Teach us to reach out to You in our need and help us to lead others to You by our example. **Amen**