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## Third Sunday of Advent - 11 December 2022

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# 11 December 2022

## Third Sunday of Advent

Reflection by Angela Marquis

### Introduction

Wait, be patient and keep faith is the essence of the readings today. There is an urgency in the waiting. We hear of good deeds and miracles worked, and hope that the promise of God will be fulfilled. Jesus opens humanity's eyes and ears in both a physical and metaphorical sense. He assures us that the Good News has arrived.

### Penitential Act

The Advent Wreath Responsory (see 'Advent Wreath Year A) often replaces the Penitential Act and therefore leads into the Opening Prayer.

Or use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you became flesh. Lord have mercy.

You offer us salvation. Christ have mercy.

You lead us rejoicing to the Father. Lord have mercy.

### Collect

*The oration*

O God, who see how your people

faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,

enable us, we pray,

to attain the joys of so great a salvation

and to celebrate them always

with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever and ever.

This third week of the season heralds a turn from an emphasis on the second coming of Christ to the impending feast of Christmas. The collect describes us as awaiting the feast of the Nativity of the Lord. Interestingly the sixth century original was slightly more theological, speaking of our expectation of the 'incarnation' rather than the 'birth'. For contemporary believers three images come to the fore here. The most profound is that of the incarnation: the divine one taking flesh and living as fully human. Following the patristic wisdom of St Irenaeus, 'what is not taken up of our humanity cannot be saved'. The primary unpacking of the incarnation is that the saviour must be born to be of one flesh with us. From this flows the prayer's understanding of the 'nativity'. The term seeks to focus our attention on the full humanity of Jesus. However, uppermost in our consciousness today, following the piety of the medieval period, is the way we immediately equate the nativity with the actual birth of the child Jesus to Mary his mother in a stable in Bethlehem, angels, magi, animals and stars all included. While the birth of a child is always a cause of joy, and a safe birth under such conditions well worth celebrating, the joy that underpins our worship and the rejoicing that can only be defined as solemn is because the divine took flesh and we have been offered salvation.

### **Acknowledgement**

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

### **First Reading**

#### **Isaiah 35:1-6, 10**

The proclamation from Isaiah rejoices at the coming splendour of God. Life will come forth from the desert, all who suffer will be saved by the retribution of God.

### **Responsorial Psalm**

#### **Psalm 145:6-10. R. cf. Isa 35:4**

*Lord, come and save us*

Israel's saving God will look after the poor and the vulnerable—the widow and the orphan, the prisoner and the stranger will be raised up.

### **Second Reading**

#### **James 5:7-10**

The coming of the Lord requires us to be patient. As the farmer waits for the fruit of the land, we too must await without judgement or complaint.

### **Gospel Reading**

#### **Matthew 11:2-11**

Like us, John faithfully waits for news of Christ's coming. Jesus assures him that miracles are being worked, while reminding his own disciples of John's greatness.

## Reflection

There is an old saying, no expectations, no disappointment. How often do we build something or someone up into something impossibly perfect, only to find that the event or the person falls short of our expectations? Many of us feel sure we will find the one, we muse about landing the dream job or believe in the integrity of a righteous cause so deeply that we give our lives to it, only to find that the reality we experience is less than the perfection we imagine. No-one and no-thing is perfect.

People are flawed, yet their imperfections make them real and interesting. Jobs and careers have good and bad days, as does life itself. Rewards are thus dependent upon our mood, circumstances, and daily pressures. Passionate goals reached through collaboration and hard work can be inspiring, yet they often require more energy than we can muster. It is important to recognise goodness and beauty in imperfection, in pain and in suffering, and sometimes in the desolation of the world, lest we be disappointed when something or someone falls short.

'What did you go out in the wilderness to see?' Jesus asks his disciples (v.7). What did they expect, a man in fine clothes? A swaying reed? A prophet? Were those who sought out John the Baptist looking for a single answer, an easy way out? Did he live up to their expectations, or were they disappointed in what they found? Despite their preconceived image, John was indeed a prophet, and much more (v.9). Not a single child born of women is greater than John the Baptist, Jesus proclaims, 'yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he' (v.11). According to Jesus, John is the prophet of all prophets, the greatest of all born human.

Isaiah gives us a clearer grasp of John. John is the wilderness, the dry-lands, the wasteland, that rejoices and blooms at the coming of God's glory and splendour. John's life has been one of patient waiting and anticipation. Like the followers of James, entreated to be like farmers unwearingly awaiting the arrival of the fruit of their labour, John has been patient. Yet, what was his life for? What was its purpose? To be lauded as a prophet, only to be condemned by a promise? Herod, bound by his oaths, must wash his hands of John like Pilate of Jesus. John gives his all for God and, like Jesus, loses his life through betrayal and fear.

Jesus inverts the story of John. He is the prophet who saw far with the eyes of his soul, who jumped for joy in recognition of the presence of Jesus while still a foetus in his mother's womb. John prepared the way and foretold the future of the coming of Christ. Yet, imprisoned in a dark and lonely cell, John cannot lay his eyes upon Jesus. He cannot see for himself the works of the Lord and must ask his disciples to go and question Jesus himself. Are you the one who is to come, or must we wait for someone else? (v. 3).

It seems ironic (and perhaps even a little cruel) that John, who has spent his life preparing for the coming of the Lord, cannot tell for himself whether Jesus is the prophesied Christ when he finally arrives, nor can he bear witness to the fulfilment of his own prophecy. Blind and deaf to the world in his confined cell, John only hears Jesus' proclamation second-hand from his own disciples, 'the blind see . . . and the deaf hear' (v.5). With this message, John's sight is returned. Does he rejoice? Does

he feel his mission is complete? Happy is the person who does not lose faith in me (v. 6). Jesus proclaims these words, not to those who are with him, but rather to John. Alone, confined, desperate for information, John is reminded to keep faith in Christ.

How difficult is it, having worked desperately hard for a particular end, when we cannot see a project to its completion? A prophet's life must at times feel pointless when there is no finality. Yet, for most of us, this is how life is. We have no way of knowing how or when we will be called from this Earth, we can only be grateful for the time we are given. There will always be those who die too young, whose lives have touched ours in a significant way. Their loss seems to be more than we can bear. In Matthew 14, John is beheaded. Grieving his death, Jesus attempts to escape to a lonely place by boat, but the crowds follow him. Jesus has compassion for them and heals them. In a way, he honours John by carrying on the promise of God.

How do we deal with disappointment and loss? Do we accept struggles and despair and look outward in compassion for ways to assist and care for the world? Or rather, do we turn inwards, and bear our grief and sorrow in silence? Every person, born in the image and likeness of God, has a purpose. We may not always know what that purpose is or understand the situation of another as we struggle to find our way in the world. Our challenge is to recognise our own gifts and the gifts of others, without placing impossible demands upon either, or imagining perfection where none is possible.

John's purpose may simply have been to prepare the way for Jesus, to call people forth to repentance, acknowledge their failures and change their ways. What a huge task and how committed he must have been to see this through. Most importantly, however, John prophesied the Christ, whose sandals he himself was unfit to carry (Matthew 3:11). He fulfilled this purpose and, while seemingly unsure of the authenticity of Jesus, John becomes the most fortunate of all prophets, for he lives to appreciate that Jesus is the Messiah, who has indeed come. Let us pray for the strength and patience of John the Baptist. May our eyes, ears and hearts be opened to recognise the coming of Christ in our midst.



**Yahweh gives bread  
to the hungry.**

# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

As we continue to joyfully await the Saviour's coming, let us raise our needs to God and trust in the Lord's unconditional love.

## Petitions

We pray for the leaders of the Church that they may zealously bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the weary and faint hearted.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all world leaders, especially for the government of Australia, that the leaders may strive to protect the dignity of the human person from life's beginning to its natural end.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who suffer throughout the world, particularly those living with a physical disability, that they may have the grace to lean on Christ through the comforting care of those around them.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all gathered around this altar that as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, our dryness may rejoice and bloom.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who travel at Christmas to be with their families. May this journey be safe and may it be a special time expressed through love and generosity to one another.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

Father, you who are ever faithful to your promises, accept this prayer and those that are still in our hearts and grant them according to your will. We make our prayer through the Spirit in the name of Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOVK	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S2
Come, O Jesus, come, O Lord				658		
Come O long expected Jesus				657	232	
Come to set us free	39		277		233	
Comfort, comfort now my people					238	
Cry out with joy						289
Let heaven rejoice	124					
O come, O come, Emmanuel	174		285	763	242	
O Emmanuel		52			241	
On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry				780	244	
Rejoice in the Lord always		75				
Rejoice the Lord is king				799	377	
The voice of God			476	835	621	
Wait for the Lord					251	
When the king shall come again					249	

## Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 145: *Lord, come and save us.*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPA
Psalm 145	178	83	pg. 12	pg. 13

## Music selections by Michael Mangan

**We rejoice** (SYJ) *based on Ps 121 (122)*

**Fill every valley** (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]

**O Emmanuel** (TT/SYJ/ CWBII) [Gathering, Communion, Recessional]

**Come, Lord Jesus, come** CH & V2 (SYJ/CWBII) [Lighting Advent Wreath]

**To you, O Lord** (LCC) *Ps 24/25 (Chn's Lectionary)* [Seasonal Psalm]

**Advent alleluia** (Vs 3) (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]

**We come, we come** (TWB) [Communion – esp V3]

**One body in Christ** (TWB) [Communion – esp V2]

**Waiting for the child** (TT/SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection]

**Chosen and sent** (LCC) [Recessional]