

## 4th Sunday of Advent, December 18, 2022

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 18:15–19, Philippians 4:4–7, Luke 1:39–56

### ***John the Baptizer Points Everyone to the Messiah***

The coming of God in all His unveiled power at Mount Sinai was terrifying to the people of Israel. The thundering voice of the Lord puts sinners in fear of death (Deut. 18:15–19). God, therefore, raised up a prophet like Moses—the Messiah, the Christ. God came to His people veiled in human flesh. The skies poured down the Righteous One from heaven; the earth opened her womb and brought forth Salvation (Introit) through the blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord (Luke 1:39–56). The fruit of her womb is the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the One whose sandal strap John was not worthy to loose.” (John 1:19–28). In Jesus we are delivered from fear and anxiety. In Him alone we have the peace of God which surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:4–7).

### **Sermon Transcript:**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we are in this season of Advent and looking for the coming of our King, the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We look back into the Old Testament at a time where God Himself was also present, where He came to the people of Israel. Except for their response was a little less enthusiastic than ours, because they are in the Old Testament and they have just been saved from Egypt. And up to this point, they've gathered at Mount Sinai and they've been following this pillar of cloud and pillar of smoke. And on Mount Sinai, God rests His presence and He speaks to the people of Israel. His voice comes out and they hear what sounds like thunder and lightning and this massive voice and fire breathing out.

Can you just imagine the sight of God being present and what they would do when He speaks in the presence of this world? It just was so massive, so mighty, so frightening. The presence of God drove the fear of God literally into the people of Israel. At least once in their existence in that wilderness, they understood the fear of God. After a while they started grumbling and complaining and whatnot. But now, at this moment, they see God and they hear God and they go to Moses and say, "We don't want to hear Him anymore." Why? We all look forward to being with our God. We know the joy of our salvation. We can't wait to be with God and to live in paradise and to see Him face to face. But what they knew of God was His holiness, His righteousness, His might and power. And they recognized that they were unworthy sinners in His presence. And the very voice of God scared them literally to death. They were afraid that if God continued to speak to them directly, that they would die.

So they said, "You know what, Moses? You go, you talk to God and we'll stay back here where it's nice and safe." As if Moses was any less afraid of God than they were. But he was the called man of God. He was the prophet of God. So he was called to be in between God and the people. And so he did. But it's interesting, how did God respond to their request? He said, "I can't believe you don't want to listen to me?" No, that's not what God said. God said, "They are right in not wanting to hear my voice directly." In other words, God was declaring that His might, His holiness and His righteousness was too much for humanity to handle. And it is right for them to be afraid of God and His presence, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And God is at this moment giving them that law in a written form so that they know without a shadow of doubt that they have failed to live up to it.

So yeah, they are rightfully afraid. And we also, without the second prophet, the prophet like Moses, but greater than Moses, if He had never come, we would be in the same place. Because we need to understand that not only are we sinners and have we rebelled against our heavenly Father, and therefore He is upset at us and frustrated with us that we have failed to live up to His expectations, but more so, we are unholy. We are unclean in a sense that sin isn't just something that we do, it is our essence that cannot be in the presence of the holy and righteous God. And so we are or should be rightfully afraid of the wrath and the holiness and the righteousness of God.

But for the sake of the second man, the second Adam, the prophet greater than Moses, we are freed from that fear. We are freed from the judgment and the wrath of God. So much so that through this second prophet, through this prophet greater than Moses, we are in fact declared holy and perfect before God. So we can look forward to seeing God, because in His eyes, we are perfect and we are holy and therefore worthy to come into His presence. Not because of what we've done, but because of what He has done for us. See, the prophet that is like Moses is greater than Moses because Moses just took the words of God and gave them to the people. He was the delivery device, but he didn't contain the words within himself. But the Great Prophet, the Son of God, He not only delivers the Word of God to us, He is the Word of God. He's endowed, he's imbued. His presence is the Son of God.

As we learn in John, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And then later on in verse 14, in chapter one, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." God's Word did come to His brothers, has come to us, and He speaks all that God commands Him because He is God's Word. And when we listen to His Word, which says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Trust in Me for your salvation." When we listen to Him, we are at peace. "Peace on earth and goodwill toward men." God's goodwill towards us is because of His presence, which leads to His death, which leads to our hope.

Because if we do not listen to that Word, that is our only hope before God, then God Himself will require an answer as to why we don't trust His Son. And that's not a conversation that I want to have. But because I know my Lord and Savior, I can rejoice. In fact, what does Paul say in Philippians? "Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say rejoice." They will know we are Christians by our love, but they will also know we are Christians because we are filled with joy and we can rejoice in all circumstances.

Now, that might seem a little odd for us at times, but even in the hard times, the difficult times, the painful times, we can rejoice. Why? Because we know God has cut them short. We know that they will not last forever. We know that God will carry us and carry us through and give us a way through this trial and tribulation. We know that God will hear our prayers and supplications. We know that we are in the palm of His hand and nothing can snatch us out of it. We know the peace that surpasses all understanding. Because of this, we can rejoice even when the immediate circumstances surrounding us are painful. Even when we are afraid, we can still rejoice because the God of peace, which surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

Think about that. God Himself guards our hearts and our minds. What's going to get through that defense? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. We are safe and we are secure. And what a joy it is to celebrate that and to look forward to that. And we remember along with Mary and Elizabeth, this is a wonderful section of Scripture with

Mary's response to Elizabeth's speaking in the Holy Spirit. We have the, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior." This is what we call the Magnificat, and we use this in our Vespers every Wednesday. We use this in our Advent services. We got hymns and canticles about this because Mary is responding to John responding to the voice. It's just incredible.

Think about this. John is the prophet who points to Jesus. And we always remember him at the Jordan baptizing people, wild hair, camel's clothes, belts, honey and wild locusts, kind of a crazy kind of looking guy, but obviously a prophet of God. And Jesus comes and he points and he says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world." And we see him pointing to Christ. And yet that wasn't his first time. John begins his life in the womb of his mother, alive as a real person in the womb of his mother, declaring the presence of the Messiah. Leaping for what? Leaping for joy because he, in the womb, is already rejoicing that his Savior is here. And Elizabeth puts words to it through the power of the Holy Spirit, that she is blessed that the mother of her Lord is there, and we are blessed because the mother of our Lord trusted the Word of God and gave birth to our Savior.

We don't venerate Mary and consider her any greater than us. She was a sinner like all of us. She needed the salvation of her son just like all of us, but what an amazing woman of faith. She's all of a teenager of something, 16 years old or so. She's been told that she's going to give birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. She could be considered an adulteress and stoned at any moment if Joseph accused her. She's not in a comfortable situation. She's going to Elizabeth because she's now pregnant without a husband, and that's not an easy place to be. So she goes to find comfort and solace in God's promise that even Elizabeth is with child and she's strengthened to be able to face what comes.

And how does she respond in that confirmation, when Elizabeth says she's the mother of the Savior? She rejoices. She says that all generations will call her blessed. Why? Because of what her son is going to do. That's why all of us are blessed, "Because He has done great and mighty things for us. And holy is His name. He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of God's mercy for us, that God promised to give mercy. And He remembers that promise and sends His son to fulfill that promise, the promise that He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Now, she speaks of Abraham. But we could go all the way back to Adam and Eve, where it was promised that Eve's son would crush the head of the serpent. So He's Adam's son. He's also Abraham's son, through whom all nations will be blessed. He's also David's son through whom He will rule not just Israel but all the world. And He's also the Son of God, so that He can redeem us and save us from our sins, so that we can hear the voice of God and not be afraid because we know that that voice comes through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the very personification of God's love to humanity.

Therefore, when we hear God and we all will on that last day. When we hear Him, every knee will bow and every tongue confess. But we're not going to bow out of fear. We're not going to confess because we have to. We're going to bow because our Lord is here and we're going to rejoice. It's a way we're going to rejoice. We get to confess God, and then we get to live with Him for all eternity. What a blessed day that will be. So we rejoice that the first prophet gave us the law, to show us our sin, to show us our need, but more importantly, we rejoice in the second greater prophet, the Prophet, the Son, the Word of God who declares us holy and righteous and perfect in His eyes.

May that grace, that mercy, that peace and that salvation be and abide with you always, now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.