



Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10

Psalms 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

## Third Sunday of Advent

December 11, 2022



### REFLECTION

Why did John the Baptist send his followers to question Jesus? After all, this was not John the Baptist's first encounter with Jesus (see Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13-17). John didn't need convincing, but perhaps his followers did. Certainly, Jesus wasn't quite the conquering messiah people were expecting! Just as the zealots of Jesus' day interpreted the prophecies and Scriptures in light of their desire for freedom from Rome, our own vision and understanding can be limited by our own political and social context. Jesus responds by calling attention to the salvific mission of healing, as referenced in Isaiah: sickness is cured, death is defeated, and God's promises are preached to the poor (Isaiah 35:5-6, 61:1). This is God's universal mission for all times and places. Blessed are those who are not offended when Jesus doesn't fit into our labels and boxes!



### ACTION

It's not easy to find trustworthy leaders to follow. Jesus and John the Baptist have different missions, but both prove themselves worthy of trust through the consistency of their actions. John is trustworthy because he holds firm to his message. He won't compromise for the powerful (for example, see Matthew 14:3-4). As Christians, we are all called to share in Christ's mission of truth and mercy, in word and in deed. Look over your own interactions this past week, in person and via social media. Are you trustworthy? How can you make your life more consistently reflect Christ's life?

**"The Science of Habits" –  
TEDx Talk by Marco Badwal:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSZy\\_zhi8C9o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSZy_zhi8C9o)



### ? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ What are some of the ways we try to make Jesus fit into our own cultural and political expectations?
- ❖ How did John the Baptist prepare the way for Christ's ministry?



December 11, 2022

# THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

## LECTIONARY #7A

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

Psalm 146:6–7, 8–9, 9–10

James 5:7–10

Matthew 11:2–11

## Prepare for the Word

*The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.*

### Leader's Context

Today, on the Third Sunday of Advent, we light the rose-colored candle as a reminder to be joyful amid our preparation! Today's Gospel addresses an important stumbling block in preparing our hearts and minds for the coming of Christ; today we reflect on those times when our expectations prevent us from recognizing God. While it was abundantly clear that John the Baptist was a prophet, Jesus did not look the part of the long-awaited messiah. Whether the imprisoned John needed reassurance or his discouraged disciples needed to hear the answer, they are sent to ask Jesus if he is, in fact, the one. Exceeding expectations, Jesus answers by referencing Old Testament prophecies, which help people to see the connections and decide for themselves.

**Q FOCUS:** *Examine your expectations of God.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

The Third Sunday of Advent is called "Gaudete Sunday" from the Latin word meaning "rejoice." The pink candle and rose-colored vestments are striking reminders to be joyful. We rejoice in our preparation because the Lord is near. Between December 16 and 24, *Las Posadas* (Spanish for "the inns" or "lodgings") is a popular tradition in Mexican-American culture. *Las Posadas* commemorates the difficult journey that Mary and Joseph made from Nazareth to Bethlehem and their search for shelter. Celebrations usually

involve a procession led by children dressed as Mary and Joseph. The group sings traditional songs as they go from door to door, asking for lodging and being rejected, until arriving at the final house, where they are welcomed inside and celebrate.

### Church Teaching Connection

"Some people carve out a 'do-it-yourself' faith that reduces God to the limited space of one's own desires and convictions. This faith is not a conversion to the Lord who reveals himself, but rather, it prevents him from enlivening our life and consciousness. Others reduce God to a false idol; they use his holy name to justify their own interests. . . . Christians believe in the God of Jesus Christ, and our desire is that of growing in the living experience of his mystery of love" (Pope Francis, General Audience, September 7, 2016).

## Hear the Word

*Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.*

### Gospel Acclamation

*Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.*

Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Matthew 11:2–11

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

*All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.*

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "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. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: / *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; / he will prepare your way before you.* / Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*Everyone may be seated.*

## Reflect on the Word

*When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:*

Within the Advent theme of joyful anticipation in this season of waiting, today's Gospel has to do with reexamining expectations. Both in the time of Jesus and now, in contemporary times, human beings have a tendency to approach experiences and encounters with expectations.

► **To what extent do you think a person's expectations have an effect on their experience?**

John the Baptist met everyone's expectations for what a prophet would look, sound, and act like. Jesus, however, did not. The long-awaited messiah

was expected to be a warrior-king that would overthrow the oppressive Roman regime. So while John's disciples believed his message about the coming of the kingdom of God, they couldn't see who that was supposed to be. On top of that was the crushing disappointment that John was imprisoned. This was not what they expected.

It is in this context of disappointment and uncertainty that John sends his disciples to Jesus, asking the big question: are you the one? Was John struggling with his own faith and needed reassurance from his prison cell. Did John know the answer, since he was the one who prophesized and prepared the way, but he told his disciples to ask because they were the ones who needed help seeing and believing?

Instead of being forceful or argumentative, Jesus helps everyone reexamine their expectations. He points to his actions in a way that references a prophecy from Isaiah, describing what it will be like when God comes. Then, he affirms John and his followers by connecting the ministry of the Baptist with the prophet Elijah. These were like “easter eggs”—insider references that both John's disciples and the Evangelist Matthew's audience would immediately get: Jesus is the one foretold and John was the messenger.

► **When something isn't what you expected, what helps you reframe and move forward? What makes it more difficult to do so?**

Sometimes our expectations are too small or too specific to our own desires for us to really be open to recognizing the greatness and goodness of God. Instead of just focusing on the oppressive situation at the time, God overcame the whole of sin and evil, which was definitely not what people expected. We wait with joyful anticipation for a God of surprises, whose love conquers death, and whose goodness surpasses all human expectation.

► **What do you expect God to be like?**

## Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 84.

**As a prophet, John the Baptist met expectations, as the messiah, Jesus did not.**

**Jesus invites us to examine our expectations of God.**

**God's greatness and goodness surpass all human expectations.**

## Act on the Word

### Examining Expectations

Facilitate a conversation about expectations. First, acknowledge that having expectations is a natural function of the human brain that helps us prepare for and respond to the world around us.

Second, clarify what is meant by "expectations," a word intentionally chosen for its broad use. Some people think of expectations as futuristic hopes and dreams, while others interpret the word to mean academic or behavioral standards. More, when those expectations become rigid preconceived notions, they can lead to unjust and immoral prejudicial attitudes and behaviors. While the Gospel passage didn't explicitly use the word "expectations," that is precisely what Jesus is addressing, particularly when it comes to our approach to God.

Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- \* What are some expectations placed upon you that have had a positive effect? How about negative effects?
- \* Do you notice anything in common among the expectations that had a positive impact? How about among the negative ones?

- \* What kinds of preconceived notions have others mistakenly had about you? How do you respond?
- \* What kinds of similarities or differences do you notice between your response and the way that Jesus responded to people's underlying assumptions in today's Gospel?
- \* What helps you recognize when your preconceived notions about others are incorrect?
- \* When it comes to our understanding of God, what kind of expectations are helpful (and why)? How about unhelpful?
- \* At what point do you think expectations become limitations? How can we avoid doing this?
- \* What truth can you glean from your own experiences of limiting preconceived notions that could be applied to our expectations of God?

### Closing Prayer

*Lord God,  
you sent John the Baptist  
to remind us  
to prepare our hearts for you.  
Awaken in us the desire  
to change our lives  
and help others experience the joy  
of a relationship with you.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.*

### For Next Sunday

*To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at [www.ltp.org/lwgr](http://www.ltp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.*