

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 11th chapter.

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then 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, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The Gospel of Our Lord. Thanks be to God.

You who are loved by God, may grace and peace be multiplied to you, in the knowledge of God and faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Christmas Story changes things.

Think of all those people in Bethlehem... in town just for a census-taking... but then after everything happened... I'm sure they left town with new hopes and dreams

Imagine Joseph... I'm sure his plans were to have a nice family carpentry business, a cozy home where his wife Mary presided, surrounded by children who would arrive in a timely and traditional fashion. Mary too—I'm sure, held similar dreams.

Maybe the Wise Men had a southern vacation planned... but ended up traveling to Bethlehem instead. Surely, they did not expect to worship a poor little baby in a barn.

The shepherds might have planned a night of camaraderie around the campfire---not a frightening encounter with a host of angels.

King Herod may have been plotting new ways to consolidate his political power—but surely he did not dream that a new and greater power (*one based on love and justice and service and humility*) would enter into this world.

So who knows how many dreams, plans, visions, were changed when Christ was born in Bethlehem? My, oh my, A baby does change everything! And how many lives today are still being touched, shaped, and re-directed by the power of God become human? Yes, there is a change a coming.

My friends, what are your dreams? What are your goals? What is on your mind these days? Is there a struggle? Is there a difficulty? Do you wish things were the way they used to be? Or are you ready to try something new? What's being changed? What new plans are you making? What is it that you have come here to see?

Advent is a time (for all of us) to remember where the true power, hope and promise of life resides... they rest in a God who knows, loves, and understands us in ways we simply cannot comprehend.

Advent is a season that wakes us up to the possibility that maybe, just maybe, the God who cares for us more than we know... might have a better vision for us than we have for ourselves.

If that is true for us, then it is also true for John the Baptist.

Just last week we heard John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness with an unmistakable and bold voice. Confident. John told us about one who "is coming to baptize with fire." John told his listeners that Jesus was going to use his winnowing fork to toss us up into the wind... and those with spiritual substance would be gathered into the saving granary... the rest burned with unquenchable fire.

With a vision like that—you can just imagine the questions going through John's mind as he sat in his prison cell... it seems like the confidence he showed as he preached and baptized at the Jordan River is wavering... especially when he hears that Jesus is bouncing little babies on his knee and saying that you have to be like one of them to get into the kingdom of heaven. John wants to know if his life work is being fulfilled. So he sends folks to ask Jesus, "*Are you the one who is to come?*"

And Jesus doesn't respond directly; Jesus starts by saying, "*Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.*"

The same for us today... Jesus doesn't so much say... "***Listen, I have important words to tell you...***" as, "*Look what my love can do for you, see what I have done for others.*"

The things that Jesus did in Galilee he still does. We who are blind to the truth about ourselves, or blind to the needs of others, or even blind to the presence of God... through the living and risen Christ have our eyes opened once again.

We who are burdened by sin and sickness are forgiven and healed.

We who have become deaf to the voice of conscience, deaf to the cries of others, deaf even to the calling from God... we have our hearing restored once again.

Those of us who are dead... dead deep down somewhere inside... are raised once again to newness and the joyful wonder of life.

We who are poor receive the riches of God's love in our lives.

During this season of Advent, as God prepares our Christmas gift of a Savior... coming to deliver us, God wants to draw our attention to the greatness of the gift. How do you get the attention of the people?

Jesus has a wonderful way of helping us see ourselves as God sees us.

- As beautiful people, as lovable people, as people who are forgivable.
- As people who are capable of things unheard of.

For Jesus is the one who loves us, and wishes to make us whole... the one who will seek us out so that we may never be lost.

Jesus has the keys to release whatever keeps us from freedom.

Jesus is making it happen. Jesus is doing it right now. We are being mended. We are being made whole. We are being raised from the dead.

The changes around us and within us are signs of the reign of God... the new creation.

There is a line at the end of Paul's letter to the Galatians where he says, "the only thing that matters is the new creation". That **IS** the only thing that matters, for Paul, for John the Baptist, for you, for me. **The new creation is everything.** Talk about **CHANGE!** This new creation is the life that comes as a gift in baptism when we are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross. We are God's own children forever.

This new life is here... right now... all around us. And we are celebrating the new creation this Advent. Because it doesn't do us a whole lot of good to think that the new life is only something yet to come. Yes, some things **ARE** yet to come, but there's also a lot of joy that is ours **TODAY!!** God is present in this very moment. God loves us completely, God speaks to us, heals, washes, forgives, and **makes us new.**

We see and experience and celebrate this newness as sweet baby Ada Weslie McCarthy Novak is baptized today. And we join with her in "walking wet" as baptized children of God throughout our lives.

We lift up our hearts, our hands, our heads, our voices, and get our feet moving right now. And if we are too weak or scared, or we lack courage, or if we're uncertain of the changes ahead... **God** will lift us up anyhow! And if we are simply curious, or holding back, we can turn to God and ask with John the Baptist, "*Are you the one who is to come or should I wait for another?*" And with John the Baptist we'll hear those words from Jesus yet again: "*the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.*"

Such hope-filled words. Hope that sees beyond our own visions. Hope that is with us when we hurry. Hope that helps us wait. It is Advent hope.

(Together) **Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.**