

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

**3<sup>rd</sup> Advent**  
**December 12, 2004**  
**Fr. Bill McGinty**

**“The Blind See, The Lame Walk...”**

Today is the third Sunday in our Advent Season. The readings today have us primed for the coming of the Messiah and for the celebration of Christmas. The gospel is full of the mission of John the Baptist and his role in mankind's salvation.

At the 10:00 a.m. Liturgy today we are introduced to another John: John James Lockwood. He has come into our midst like a precious gift. Today is the day of his Baptism. Today John James is welcomed into the family of God. Today he walks with Jesus and becomes his disciple; today the Holy Spirit comes upon him in precisely the same way he did on the Apostles at Pentecost. Today we can wonder with Lauren and Jim, “What will this child turn out to be?” In baptizing John James today we invite the Holy Spirit to bring grace and wisdom into his life, to guard and guide him in the years ahead, and to bring him safely home when life's long journey is over.

Looking at John James today we can only ponder the thoughts that surrounded Elizabeth, the mother of John and the cousin of Mary, 2000 years ago. Did she worry about her little child? Both she and her husband Zachariah were well on in years. Who would care for her child? How would he turn out? What was this plan God had for him?

Elizabeth worried already knowing that one hundred miles away her pregnant cousin was setting out on a journey; a journey that would take her to Bethlehem and the birth of the Messiah. Elizabeth worried for Mary. Already her world had been turned upside down. Her child had arrived. The Romans had marched into Palestine. Herod the Great had begun a desperate search for the child predicted by the prophets. The whole world seemed to be waiting anxiously for the arrival of this child.

Thousands of miles to the East, Wise men had begun to follow a star that fulfilled prophecies of the birth of a King. In the night skies they had read the signs. Now they moved West keeping the star ahead of them until they came to the borders of Herod's land. Despite Herod's reputation they knew they could not turn back, but they would have to cross into his territory. They would pay their respects, but this was not the King they sought. They sought another. Before them the star continued to move across the Heavens.

All of this, of course, came about because of the birth of Jesus. Ask any class of children about Christmas and they will tell you that Jesus came to save mankind, to save all of us, to eradicate sin, and to teach us a new way. But, there is a sense in which Jesus just came for you and he just came for me. To say Jesus came for all Mankind is to hide in the crowd. Jesus came for you to place purpose, destiny and God in your path. Look back on your life, as we all must do, from time to time, and you will see the color that Jesus placed there and the teaching he gave you that has become your teaching and the path that you follow.

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Jesus came 2000 years ago for John James Lockwood because he wants and needs him in his Universal plan of Salvation. Without John James God's plan is just that bit harder to accomplish. Today the flame of Christian faith is passed on to a new generation who will carry it with pride and live it with hope and pass it on to their children with love.

Two and a half thousand years ago Isaiah the Prophet compared God's Kingdom to a wilderness, a dry land that will be turned into a blossoming fruitful land by the coming of a Messiah. It will be as though creation had begun anew. "The eyes of the blind will be opened the lame will walk."

Isaiah's words were fulfilled 500 years later in the person of Jesus the Christ. But there is a sense in which each of us must find the fulfillment of those words if we are to be saved. Jesus must be sought out by each one of us. Our salvation is not automatic. We are not paying off a credit card. We are seeking the salvation of our God. There is but one way to do that and that is to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus. In the early church people went to extraordinary lengths to do this. They lived on Islands, and in caves. They went into the solitude of the desert with one purpose: to encounter their savior at a personal level.

"What did you go out into the wilderness to seek?" Jesus asks his followers in today's Gospel. "You went to seek a prophet. A messenger who would put you in touch with your God."

There is a fear that many people have of meeting Jesus. Face to face or even talking to him person to person. Instead, they will work in his church, feed his poor, embrace his homeless, visit his prisoners, and clean the unclean in the worst gutter and ditches. But ask them to verbalize a prayer to the Lord of their life and they will find one more thing to do, one more soul to save, one more mouth to feed.

So what are we all so afraid of, given that we are seeking out God himself? The author of the Universe; the single most powerful almighty Being in all existence? The answer is that the majority of us do not give a fig about all that. We'd be more nervous meeting Julia Roberts. The truth is that it is not Jesus that scares us, rather it is ourselves. None of us wants to meet Jesus because we look in the mirror and see what we don't want to see; ourselves as we really are. All our tricks, our smart ways, the way we sell ourselves is stripped away and what is left is little naked old me, with all my faults, with all my sins, all my lies and all my wants. We look at ourselves and think: "how pathetic!" And we desperately look around for someone we think really needs saving more than we do. We would like to meet Jesus, but not just yet, and definitely not like this.

Really we could not be more wrong. Every word, every idea, and every teaching in the Gospels tells us that we are wrong, and so wrong.

Jesus, our Savior does not even consider the way we feel about ourselves. Rather he wraps a large white robe around us. It is the white robe of Baptism. It covers our former self. And it washes away our old ways. We are saved because we are born anew. Jesus becomes

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the Father in the Prodigal son story welcoming each of us home. And yes, after life's toils and troubles, we will be limping home, we will be blind, deaf and unclean. But his words will wash all that away: "The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, even the dead rise again."

Our personal encounter with Jesus will be no different than John James encounter with him in today's liturgy. He will wash us once more in the waters of Baptism and make us whole again, welcoming us into his Kingdom.

There are a few things I do not get to do and one of them is Baptism. I am just here to pour the water. It is God himself, in the form of the Holy Spirit, who comes down and consecrates this child. All the rest of us are simply here to say: "Amen."

This year John James will play Jesus in the Christmas pageant at 7:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve. Nothing could be more appropriate. Playing such a big role is tiring and full of pressure and commitment. John James will be here.

But, what about you adults? Will you be here? Christmas is about Jesus. This Christmas come and thank him for the gifts you have received: your wife/husband, the children, your parents, and the comfort of a home. Pray for a year ahead free from sorrow. Pray for help with the grave responsibilities of parenthood. It will be a gift Jesus will return to you tenfold.

In the movie "The American President" Michael Douglas says: "America is serious business. America is advanced citizenship. You have to want it real bad."

Today America is in a lot of trouble and for the sake of John James and his generation we have to lift our game and play to the highest standard we can achieve as a people. Today is a time for politicians to become statesman, soldiers to be great soldiers, and citizens to be great citizens. This Christmas season I would like us as a church and as a community to pray for our country and our people. We are a great people and we must remember that when we place ourselves under God's love, protection and law, we rise as a nation to the highest aspirations of our Founding Fathers.

As we pray for John James today let us resolve to give him the America we grew up in: where liberty and justice sit side by side. Where it was okay to work hard, be close to your family, and love your country.

In our present hour of need let us pray for our nation and the wars it must fight, foreign and domestic; for the moral rights that we Christians strive to preserve.

In this Eucharist let us pray for John James and America.

Amen +

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