

3 ADVENT DECEMBER 12, 2010 CYCLE "A"

TITLE: RECOGNIZE JESUS YOUR MESSIAH

READINGS: Isa. 35:1-10, Ps.146:5-10, James 5:7-10, Matt. 11:2-11

Mary Lin Hudson one of the co-authors of a publication I use called "New Proclamation" tells about her experience in 2005 when Nevada and California received above average rain fall during the winter months. The result was the blooming of wild flowers in the desert as far as the eyes could see. Mary Lin decided to take a trip to Death Valley. "Standing on the floor of Death Valley," she said, "and looking toward the surrounding rim of mountains, I witnessed a myriad of rare blooms blanketing the desert landscape. Seeds of plants that grew only in that harsh, dry region, hidden in the hard, dry soil for years, now sprang into being, exposing new and exotic life forms. The variety was amazing. It was a resurrection of sorts – the response of a waiting earth to a rare gift of water from above."

In the prophet Isaiah today we experience the same radical transformation. Listen to his hope-filled words of expectancy and joy for even the stark desert will rejoice and blossom with incredible beauty when God's people return from their Babylonian captivity and sing and dance their way to Zion. "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing...For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water...A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way...the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord, shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads." Isa.35:1,6b,7a,8a,9b,10a.

It would be difficult to paint a picture in which the beauty of God's creation and the joy of the Lord are portrayed more vividly than Isaiah does in chapter 35. God's people rejoice, sing and dance as they recognize what Yahweh has done for them. It is time for us to rejoice as well on this third Sunday of Advent as we experience these same sentiments of expectancy, and anxious waiting in hope to celebrate again our own return to the manger in Bethlehem. "Rejoice in the Lord always," says Paul in his letter to the Philippians, "again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near." Phil.4:4.

Yes, the Lord **is** near! And here comes John the Baptist to us in the Gospel pericope asking on his own behalf and ours as well, "Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?" Matt.11:3. Why do you think John would even ask Jesus that question? After all, John saw himself as the prophet whose mission was to announce the coming of the Messiah. He had pointed Jesus out, "Look," he said, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Jn.1:29. John the Baptist was the truest believer Jesus had. Doesn't it seem strange that he should ask, "Are you the one who is to come?" But the Baptist, too, had to truly recognize his Messiah, just as each one of us personally does. We, too, need to ask ourselves, "Are you the one who has come into my life, or has it been another?"

As we see John the Baptist struggle to understand, we must realize that there are some other important questions implied in the one he sent to Jesus. If you are the one who is to come, when will you start to separate the wheat from the chaff? Remember in Matthew 3:12 John had proclaimed, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." John hadn't seen any of that from Jesus yet. And another question: When will the terrible King Harod be brought down from his throne? And still another: If Jesus is the one to come, why am I still in prison? When will the captives be released?

How does Jesus answer John's questions? "Go 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." Matt.11:4-5 Open your eyes, John, and see who your Messiah really is! I am not the military hero, not the superman you envision destroying the Romans and their empire. You have not grasped that my Kingdom is not of this world. And if you take my yoke upon you, you will begin to understand who I really am, what kind of a Messiah I am, for I am gentle and humble of heart. For it was when they ask him who is the greatest in the Kingdom, that Jesus set a little child in their midst. Matt.18:1-2. When he is arrested in Gethsemane, Jesus does not call upon 12 legions of angels from his Father, but goes with his abductors quietly. His Kingdom does not come about by violence but by the Master "giving his life as a ransom for many."Matt.20:28.

So what is the question we need to ask ourselves this third Sunday of Advent? It is this: Have we truly recognized our Messiah in our own lives? Have we let him in? Do others recognize him in ours? We are Jesus' physical presence today. We are the church. What do I see in the person next to me? Do I see Jesus? What does he or she see in me? Do I see Jesus in my home, in my spouse, my children? Do I take my Lord to work with me? Do I walk with my Lord in every aspect of my life?

Isaiah prophesied about what would take place when the Messiah would arrive. He came and did not conquer the world with unquenchable fire as John the Baptist had expected, but by means of suffering and love. God chose to work through a vulnerable infant and the little insignificant people and places of life, like a manger a carpenter's shop and a cross. He even chose to work through you and me. We may be able to lead others to the manger, but they will never see Jesus in the cradle, unless they first see him in our hearts. **Amen.**

Pastor Barney