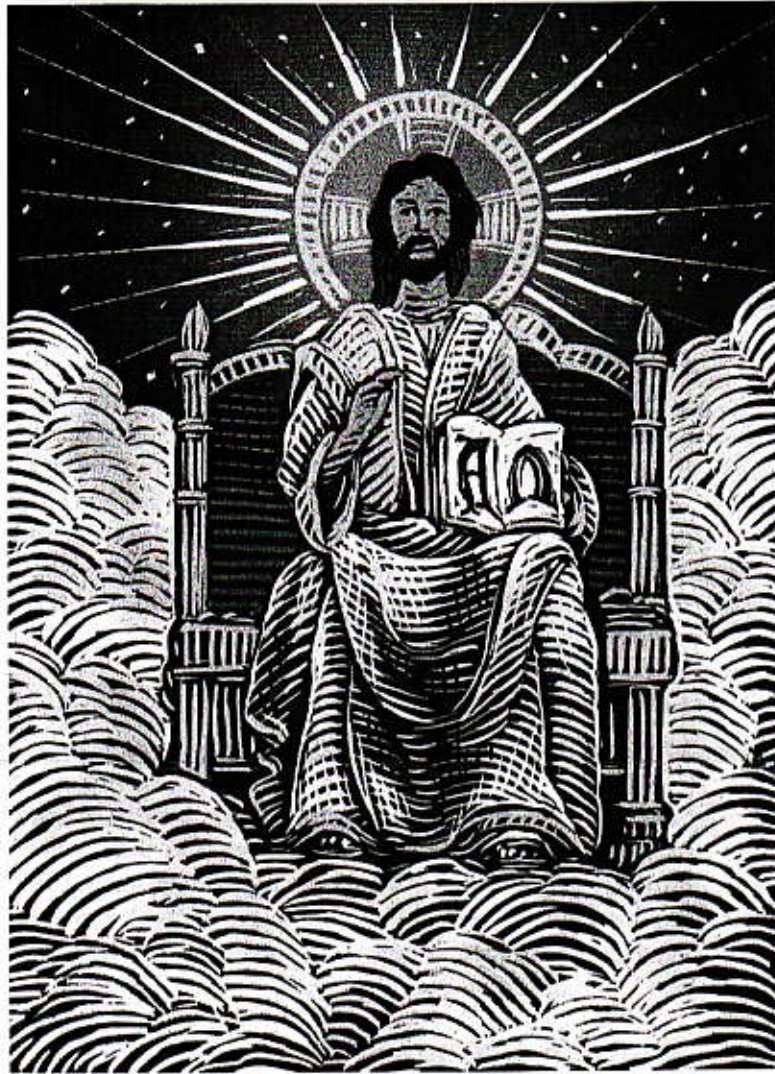


Third Sunday of Advent



Prayer of Preparation

Lord God,
you gave John the baptizer courage
to call people to follow your law.
Now we, too, ask: What should we do?

Open our eyes to the wonders of your
creation.
Open our ears to hear your voice
when you call.
Open our hearts to receive your love.
Lift our voices to proclaim your Gospel
throughout the world.
Strengthen our arms to embrace the poor.

Show us, Lord, how to prepare
for your coming,
so that, in the end, we may be filled
with the mercy and righteousness of God
and found with our faces upturned toward
your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

December 13, 2009 What Should We Do?

The last half of the season of Advent is marked by heightened anticipation of the coming of Christ. The preaching of John the baptizer is our clear answer to the question, What should we do to prepare for the coming of Christ? His words confirm that caring for others and doing justice in the world are primary concerns. He also displays the humility that allows him to point to the coming of the Lord and get out of the way. John's portrait of the one to come is not very comforting—a reaper who will gather those who are worthy into his barn and dispense with the unworthy in an unquenchable fire. Yet, here is Paul, who tells us not to have any

anxiety, but to rejoice in the coming of the Lord. Here also is the prophet Zephaniah who tells us that God will rejoice over us as well. Is this meant to be confusing? The readings today encourage us in this Christian life we are living between the joy of Jesus' birth, which tells us of God's love for us, and the anticipation of Christ's Second Coming in glory and the manifestation of God's mercy and justice for all creation. The joy of the first gives us grace and courage to prepare for the second in such a way that we participate in God's mercy and justice even now and until that time that Christ comes again.

This Week at Home



Monday, December 14 Saint John of the Cross

One of the Church's great mystics, Saint John of the Cross, lived in Spain from 1542 to 1591. His writings describe the soul's ascent to God and, often, the hardships and attachments that lie on that path. (The phrase "dark night of the soul" comes from the title of one of his works.) With Saint Teresa of Avila, he worked zealously to reform the Carmelite Order, for which he was punished and rejected by those who opposed the reform. But he persevered, and today the Discalced (barefoot) Carmelites continue their life of prayer and compassion throughout the world.

Tuesday, December 15 Doing the Will of the Father

"A man had two sons . . ." begins the Gospel today (Matthew 21:28–32). Jesus begins another parable that teaches and surprises his listeners. Two sons have been asked by their father to go and work in the vineyard. One says no but reverses his decision. The other says yes but does not go. Jesus asks simply: "Which of the two did the will of his Father?" When the elders give the obvious answer, he takes the opportunity to teach them—and us—an uncomfortable lesson about the ways we may not be doing God's will.

Wednesday, December 16 Giving Witness

In today's Gospel (Luke 7:18b–23), when John the baptizer sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the one to come, Jesus invites them to tell John what they have seen and heard. In this way he is telling John to read the evidence of his healing and preaching and compare it to what he knows about the promise of God. What would you point out to show someone that God is present and active in the world? How would you give witness to the identity of Jesus?

Thursday, December 17 O Antiphons

Today we begin the great octave (a period of eight days) before Christmas. From now until December 23, Evening Prayer (also called Vespers) will include the great O Antiphons. These are special refrains placed before and after the Canticle of Mary. Each names a specific title for the Messiah, along with a prayer inviting the Messiah to come and free us. Today we pray, "O Wisdom!" and ask that he will come and show us the way to salvation.

Friday, December 18 O Lord of Ancient Israel!

The title for the Messiah in today's Evening Prayer is "O Lord of Ancient Israel." In this antiphon we ask the Lord to stretch out his mighty hand to set us free. This prayer reminds us that Christ was with the Father during the Exodus when he brought Israel out of Egypt "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm . . . and with signs and wonders" (Deuteronomy 26:8).

Saturday, December 19 O Root of Jesse!

Today's O Antiphon comes from Isaiah 11:1, where we read that "a shoot shall spring from the stump of Jesse, / and from his roots a bud shall blossom." This is one of the many prophecies that foretells the coming of a Messiah. Jesse was the father of King David from whose family the Messiah was to come. So today's antiphon, "O Root of Jesse," refers to Christ's ancestors and then prays that nothing will keep the Messiah from coming to our aid.



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Keeping the Seasons
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