

Intro

Good morning my sisters and brothers in Christ.

Happy New Year! Now we are in Year A, which is the gospel of Matthew. The four gospels give us a different perspective of Jesus as Messiah and Redeemer. With the gospel of Matthew, his audience is the first century Jewish community that **really believed Jesus** was the long awaited messiah. **We today** take this statement for granted, but to the Jewish community deeply rooted in the Old Testament prophecies, the messiah's coming was a game changer, a really big deal. Today, we, lack an appreciation of the OT and the full power that Jesus brings. We need to read this gospel through the ancient eyes of a first century Jewish person. Jesus is the new Moses (lawgiver), the new David (King), the new Solomon (Wisdom). Matthew is the gospel that teaches us the principle; **the NT is hidden in the OT and the OT is revealed in the new.**

Modern critics of the gospel are quick to say, why are there so many differences among the four gospels? It is a way for them to question the validity of scripture. The answer is each author of their own Gospel has an intended audience and purpose in mind. It is quite normal to have an event captured by multiple perspectives that do not agree 100% of the time. For example, I offer the birth of my son Andrew, (I was there for the entire process), so if we would have asked for a one line statement from four people present in the room when Andrew was born, you might hear from:

- Andrew (my son) – **I don't remember a thing**
- The OB/ GYN Doc – **I have hands like Greg Olson** (Braves catcher in 1990)
- Sue (mom) – **I knew he had health issues when he was born** – the clinical nurse side
- Tom (dad) –What are they doing? I don't know what to do? I'm lost,

Needless to say, all four perspectives are valid as related to the birth of my son Andrew.

Body

Today, all four readings point to the coming of the Lord. In our first reading from the prophet Isaiah (8th Century BC) , we find that Israel and Judah have been or are destroyed by foreign armies . Things are not looking good. Isaiah offers a new vision for Israel and Judah during these dark times. Isaiah not only speaking to a physical well-being (feeble hands and weak knees), but a healing of the heart (not fearful, but strong). We need to have a heart open to God. God comes to save us and when he does, the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap, the mute will sing.

The psalm today reminds us that the LORD not only brings about physical healing, but will restore **basic human dignity** all to people. Listen to the action words from the psalm: secures justice, raises up, and protects; ‘The Lord keeps faith and will reign forever’.

This psalm shouts “With the coming of the Lord, joy, and hope flow” to all.

In the gospel there are really two parts. First, Jesus answers a question and then speaks about JBAPT. JBAPT is in prison because he called out King Herod’s immoral behavior. JBAPT is perhaps sensing what is coming, or some scholars contend John is not sure about how the Lord’s coming will come to fruition. Remember, these were **real people with human struggles that walked by Faith**; because the Lord does not give **them (or us)** a script to follow. So JBapt sends his disciples to Jesus, to prove to them, Jesus is the real deal, the Messiah. So they go to Jesus and ask, **are you the one who is to come?** Jesus could have offered a short answer, “**Yes I am** “ , but instead Jesus goes back and **refers to the prophet Isaiah** and points to his deeds and signs (blind see, lame walk, lepers are clean, deaf hear , dead raised , and the poor will have good news) . So Jesus quotes what a first century Jewish believer would be looking for when the Messiah has come.

In the second part, Jesus speaks about JBAPT. He builds John up, John is more than a prophet, John someone who:

- Maintains his convictions (not a reed being swayed in the wind)
- Lives simply (does not have all the comfort and security of working in a palace)
- Will announce the coming of the one who will the new and final age (Messiah)

John is foretelling of Jesus' coming. But then Jesus makes a statement that has a twist!

John is the greatest of prophets, yet **the least** in the kingdom of heaven is **greater than John**.

So who is the least in the kingdom?

Look to Jesus to be the model of 'least'. Later in Matthew, Jesus tells us to be humble (like a child) in order to be the greatest. At Christmas Jesus takes human nature and comes to us as a child. Isn't it amazing the God of the universe would come to us to be born in a barn? Jesus made humility and gentleness the foundation of all virtue. Jesus is the least as he takes on humanity.

So for us to be greater than John, we have to be a Christian, a lover and an imitator of Christ.

So when you read or listen to the prophet Isaiah, he is sending you the first Christmas card from 2700 years ago by announcing the coming of the Lord who will heal us and save us. Look to the future with joy Nearly 2000 Years ago, Jesus is fulfilling Isiah's words and is inviting us to enter into relationship with Him as the least and **for us** to bring others **to HIM** to heal and save. Look to the future with joy.

Closing

So I would like to offer to you a different perspective of **the least serving the least**. There is a lot of good happening in our surrounding area. Let me see if you can guess what ministry I am describing. There are three of these centers located within a 10 mile radius of our church. They are a Christian based ministry, two are Protestant and one is Catholic. Here is the scope their ministry:

- Offer free education in life skills for young adults learning how to be parents
- Offer some limited free medical care , but can refer those in need to physicians (if available who will provide free exams and treatment)
- Offer clothing and furniture as needed in limited amounts and sizes
- Most importantly, offer to clients the chance to open their heart and receive the Lord's love and mercy and look to the future with joy.

Who are they? They are the pregnancy resource centers of Forest Park, Jonesboro and Fayetteville doing God's work for the least of these and giving women and men the support they need to make healthy choices for themselves and their unborn baby.

For this is the 3d Sunday of Advent, this is Gaudete Sunday (means "rejoice.") This Christmas, save the last present on your list for Jesus. Let that last present be to give our 'heart and will' (**our being**) to Jesus this Christmas.

We can fulfill Jesus' words from the gospel by saying 'Yes' to his invitation to be the least in the Kingdom.

Let the Joy Begin – Amen!

MT 11: 2-11,

15 Dec 19 –3rd Sun in Advent

Gaudete Sunday

<https://catholicexchange.com/35-incontrovertible-evidence-matthew-112-11>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhB-ZMiPasM>

<https://ocarm.org/en/content/lectio/lectio-divina-matthew-1111-15>

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/ask-a-franciscan-did-john-the-baptist-doubt-jesus/>

<https://jewsforjesus.org/answers/top-40-most-helpful-messianic-prophecies/>