



# ST. MATTHEW PARISH

## Advent 2020 Week 2

### ► 2nd Sunday of Advent GOSPEL:

Mark 1:1–8

**One is coming mightier than I.**

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

Behold, I am sending **my** messenger **ahead** of you;  
he will **prepare your way**.

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight his paths.”

John the Baptist appeared in the desert  
proclaiming a **baptism** of repentance  
for the forgiveness of sins.

People of the whole Judean countryside  
and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem  
were going out to him  
and were being **baptized** by him in the **Jordan River**  
as they **acknowledged their sins**.

John was clothed in **camel's hair**,  
with a leather belt around his waist.  
He fed on **locusts** and wild honey.

And this is what he proclaimed:

“One mightier than I is **coming after me**.

I am not worthy to stoop  
and loosen the thongs of his sandals.

I have baptized you with **water**;  
he will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit**.”

## ► 2nd Sunday of Advent REFLECTION:

### John the Baptist appeared...

The camel hair shirt, the wild man look...is John for real, or is this a costume, an act? We've all seen people use a shocking appearance to get noticed (Alice Cooper, Friedrich Nietzsche, Fr. McCabe, Ozzy). It happened in the ancient world too. So is John genuinely free of vanity, or is he putting on a "poor me" show? Well, he is wearing the itchiest shirt in recorded history. It doesn't just look bad. It's the shirt that hurts. Plus he lives in the wild, and he eats bugs. Nutritious bugs, but still...bugs. I'm convinced. If John the Baptist says "it ain't about the money," I believe him. Besides, there is no money in being John the Baptist. John is living a life that **cannot be done for show**.

John the Baptist is the realest of the really real.

### Baptism of repentance in the Jordan River

After God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, His chosen people lived a nomadic life for forty years. They knew exactly where they were, but they are still described as "lost" because they did not know **where they were going**. *God promised them a land but had not yet shown them where to find it. As they wandered, other "lost" people joined them. Becoming a member of the chosen people involved a profession of faith in the One God and a ceremonial washing.*

John the Baptist calls fellow Jews back to the beginning, to the river they crossed as they entered the promised land. John is washing them as if they are Gentiles becoming Jews. They are, they admit, somewhat false Jews **becoming really real Jews**.

### As they acknowledged their sins

This is the essence of repentance. We realize that life is bigger and better than our sins. Sorrow for our sins is a beginning, not the finish line! Once the sorrow has brought us to God, it has done its job and is free to go. What happens next is so beautiful, so powerful that it can be awkward. **God loves us, forgives us and shows us which way to go**. I picture the Jews splashing in the river like children, thinking, "We're really doing this, aren't we? We are His from now on. This is wild. But fun."

In the 1100s, a man named Thomas Beckett was living his life for power and pleasure. Then God got a hold of him, and Beckett had a profound conversion. For Beckett, the sight of himself taking in the Gospel and trying to live by it was **comical**. As he gave away his possessions to the poor, he said, "This is too easy. Lord, I wish there was something really hard to give away so I could give it to You. But Lord...are you laughing at me?" Later on, Beckett did get to give God something precious. He was martyred.

John the Baptist or Thomas Beckett or you or me: with our sins, we tried to prove to God that He shouldn't love us. Taken up now into the love of God, the things we did to avoid His love look absurd, even laughable; but what makes us laugh from the belly and the heart is the vast goodness of God.

### One Mightier than I is Coming

John the Baptist appears as a **nobody** who has nothing: nothing, that is, compared to the One Who is coming. John only cares what his Lord thinks of him. This focus frees John from vain concerns. John is comfortable acknowledging his own sinfulness and limitations; and thus John is **real**. He is a credible witness to the urgency of turning back to God.

John sees that the Mighty One is indeed coming, and John adjusts his life around that fact. His life, as adjusted-to-God (aka *justified*), *is more lively, more vivid*. *Jesus will even say that John is the fiery prophet Elijah. What John says about Jesus ("One mightier than I is coming") is true also of John. In response to the Coming One, a **mightier John** is emerging from within John.*

The Mighty Lord is coming. Our reflection ends with this realization: because of His coming, we may feel the stirring of a newer, mightier person within us. The Lord **isn't coming so we can stay the same, that's for sure!** In our catechesis this week, we will turn John's witness upside down. When the Mighty Lord comes, we will see a lowliness even humbler than the guy in the camel hair shirt. We will look at the Incarnation, the mystery of God the Son becoming man.

## ► 2nd Sunday of Advent CATECHESIS:

In this second week of Advent, our catechesis peers into the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord. Incarnation means “into flesh.” What does it mean that God becomes man? We need to bring with us everything we learned about the Trinity as we look at the Incarnation of our Lord. This mini theology lesson is going to get a bit technical, but it will turn out that all the technical stuff is about LOVE. (I promise!)

### Part One: getting ready to ask

Good questions and good answers go together like apples and apples. A question of this KIND gets an answer of the same KIND.

Q: How many? A: a number.

Q: Where? A: a place.

Q: Dallas?! A: Go Birds!

If we ask “WHO?” the answer is going to be a PERSON.

If we ask “WHAT?” the answer is going to be a NATURE.

PERSON. The best definition of “person” comes from Boethius (477-524 AD): an individual substance of a rational nature. Say what? A thing of a kind that thinks. A person is a thinking kind of thing. A person is an “I.”

NATURE. A nature is the KIND of thing something is. Try not to think about this too hard.

WHAT is this? A baseball.

WHAT is this? A different baseball.

What do they have in common? Baseball NATURE.

WHO is this? Ms. Madison. WHO is this? Ms. Regan.

WHAT is this? A human. WHAT is this? Another human.

WHAT do these have in common? HUMAN NATURE.

### Part Two: asking our Lord

Lord, WHO are You? “I am God the Son.”

Lord, WHAT are You? “I am divine and I am human.”

Lord, is it weird to be asked WHO and WHAT You are? “Not in the slightest. I’ve enjoyed some great conversations, made a lot of good friends because people ask.”

### Divine and human.

Jesus is God the Son. He is one PERSON. Jesus is God, but He is NOT God the Father and NOT God the Holy Spirit.

### Part Three: One Person, Two Natures

The only Being in the universe with two natures is Jesus Christ. There is no other to compare Him to. The Incarnation is unique.

At the Annunciation, Mary says “yes.” By the power of the Holy Spirit, she becomes a mother. Mary knows that the baby growing within her is God the Son. Mary is first to know something BIG: God is the Trinity. **No wonder she did a lot of pondering in her heart!** How does one break the news that the One God is Three Persons? The words “person” and “Trinity” hadn’t been invented yet!

God the Son takes a human nature from Mary His mother, and He unites that human nature to Himself. That means that our Lord has what makes up a human being: our Lord has a human body and a human soul. His human soul thinks with a human mind and chooses with a human will.

He doesn’t stop being God the Son, though. His divine nature means He thinks with the mind of God and chooses with the absolute freedom of God.

How does a being with **two minds** and **two powers** of freedom get up and cross the room for a glass of water? We might imagine that having two natures would be terribly confusing. Our Lord, however, is not all twitchy and confused. His divinity and humanity are not mixed up, not blurred. His two natures stay distinct and are **perfectly united in one Person**: God the Son. He is one divine “I.” Whatever He does, He does as one whole Person.

## ► 2nd Sunday of Advent CATECHESIS (continued):

### Part Four: My brain hurts. Can we talk about love now?

Suppose someone is holding a pitcher of orange juice. Suppose that person empties the pitcher over my head. With what substance do I get wet? Exactly. Orange juice. What is inside is what pours out.

In the Trinity, the Father pours out His love. His love looks back at Him and says, "I'm your Son, and I love you too."

In the Incarnation, the Father loves His Son into our human condition. He pours His love, His Son into our good and bad, our here and now. The Father sends His Son among us as one of us to save us.

Notice the continuity. In the Trinity, the Father pours out His love. In the Incarnation, the pouring extends into the human scene; and God the Son becomes man. **What is in the Trinity is exactly what pours out into humanity: God Who is love.**

A professor of mine once said, "All forms of internal distress are social problems; and social problems can only have social solutions." In other words, **growth and healing only happen through relating to others.** How does Jesus Christ change us? By relating to us. Want to help someone? Start by seeking to understand and relate to that person.

When we ask our Lord, "WHAT are You?" we get two answers. One answer gives relief and comfort: "I'm exactly what you are. I'm human." The other gives us hope and a sense that a kindly Power has just turned up and taken our problems in his sovereign grip: "I'm exactly what you are not. I'm divine."

### John the Evangelist frames the mystery of the Incarnation for us:

In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God...  
and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

## ► 2nd MONDAY of Advent DISCUSSION:

On **Monday, December 7th at 7:00pm,**  
**Fr. Kevin McCabe will be in our church AND on Facebook Live**  
**hosting our DISCUSSION for the 2nd Week of Advent.**

### Do you ever wonder if you're a disciple or just acting like a disciple?

- This is a common experience. It's not a great question, but not a bad one *if it makes us more attentive.*
- What are the signs in our lives that we are actively trying to be real with God and others?
- We can second-guess anything. It's strange that "action" and "acting" don't always mean the same thing.  
We have to be careful not to dismiss our efforts as unreal.

### Is repentance/conversion a joy for us, or a drag?

- Do we enjoy a good Confession?
- Do we see the humor in our ongoing conversion to the Lord?

### A Mightier One is coming.

- This is true first and foremost of the Lord Himself. Do we expect our Lord to come again in glory?
- Do we look for the times and ways the Lord is coming into our lives (or the people in our lives)?
- In response to our coming Lord, a mightier self emerges. What does the mightier you think about?

### True God and true man.

- Jesus Christ is what we are. He has what we need. What do you need from Him?
- He changes us by relating to us. What are our strong and weak points in relating to Him?