



The Third Sunday of Advent (C)
December 16, 2018
8:00 a.m.
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Journey with me, if you will, back to your high school days. For some of us, that was not too long ago. For others of us, that was a very long time ago. For me, it seems like *very* long ago.

I would venture to say that many if not most of us here went off to a college or university. While in high school, can we remember a parent, guidance counselor or teacher saying something like, “Now, you should really apply yourself, study hard and do well if you ever want to be successful in life”? Does that ring a familiar bell to you?

With that bell and other bells ringing in my head as an impressionable youth in high school, I worked hard. I worked hard and anticipated a college or university experience in my future. Like many of my classmates, I was involved in many extracurricular activities. The day-to-day life of high school was complex and very busy. College somewhat slipped up on me, and it was fairly late in my high school years that I got serious about the future. I finally applied to a couple of my targeted schools and was accepted.

I believe that that most students will have decided within a short time of a campus visit if the school is a right fit or not. Some will say that about a church experience as well. After returning from a European concert tour with the USA Band, I visited St. Meinrad College in southern Indiana and fell in love.

Years of anticipation, preparation and study were all part of the journey from high school to college. For me, undergraduate study led to graduate study and on to more and more graduate study.

Can you remember those early years just out of high school? Did we have any idea where we would ‘end-up’ in life? Did we have an inkling that life and career paths would enable us to have so many different experiences?

Did John the Baptist have an inkling of the role in which he would play in salvation history? Can we put ourselves in his shoes, better yet, sandals, the sandals of John, the cousin of Jesus?

We know a bit about John. We know that his mother who was Elizabeth and his father who was Zachariah. We know that after Mary’s encounter with the Angel that she was to bear the Son of God that she rushed with excitement to her cousin, Elizabeth. At that moment, a child leapt in Elizabeth’s womb, and that child was John.

Perhaps, John was simply a faithful Jewish lad who kept kosher, who studied the Torah and who went to synagogue like others of his day. However, we believe that John was special. We believe that John was the prophetic bridge between the old and the new, the Hebrew Tradition and the Christian Tradition as it would eventually be called.

John's prophetic voice cried in the wilderness, and he was called to prepare the way of the Lord. What did that preparation entail? What did his life look like?

Imagine, if you will, that John and Jesus were born within about a year of one another. Often pictured as a much older character in tattered clothing and ripe from the heat and dirt of the desert, John seemed a unique character, and Jesus and he were contemporaries.

Biblical scholarship poses that John was perhaps a member of the storied Essene Community, a desert community, a kind of monastic community, out in the desert. Many believe that the members of that community were the transcribers of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Scholars have posited that Jesus may have also been a member of that community.

John came from the desert knowing well who he was and his position in the story of the First Century. That story would enable him to tell us much as evidenced in today's Gospel. That story would involve his own death and the death of his cousin, Jesus. That story would involve his acknowledgment that he was not the anticipated Messiah and not worthy to even untie the Messiah's sandals.

John's story is one of integrity and truth. John's story was similar to the story of Jesus who lived a life of integrity and truth. We might also say that about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Turned upside down when she said "yes" to the Angel to bear the Son of God, Jesus, Mary's story was one of integrity and truth.

How about your story and my story? Are we not people of faith who strive to live lives of integrity and truth and also expect the same of others? Are we people of discernment who can through our relationship with God bring the values of the Gospel into the world in which we live, work and play?

Some ten days from now, we will stand before the manger at Christmas. As we face the crèche, we will hopefully stand in humility and truth. We recognize our need for forgiveness, wholeness and strength. We recognize that there just may be things in our lives which need to be more value centered and which challenge us to demand the same of those who we expect to be role models for us and for our children.

Life is a journey. Beyond high school and early adulthood, we journeyed. During Advent, we are called to journey and reflect on who we are today which just may be very different than who we were ten, twenty or thirty years ago.

On this the Third Sunday of Advent, we hear the word, "Rejoice" in the Letter to the Philippians, and we do 'rejoice' while journeying to the manger. It is a journey for which that manger stood and for which it stands today. In to that manger came the very love of God for each and every one of us, a love which challenges us to be all we are called to be as followers of Jesus.

Advent continues. Let *us* continue to prepare our hearts for the one born to us, the savior given to us, and the values gifted to us then and now. Amen.