

Gaudete
St. Matthew 11:2-10
December 17th, 2017
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Works of Christ

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The season of Advent is often referred to at the season of St. John the Baptist. He is the forerunner to Christ. He prepares the way for Christ. Therefore, he prepares the way for the coming of our Lord in the flesh during this season of Advent. His words prepare for our Lord's coming on the Last Day. And his words prepare us to receive our Lord daily, when He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments. This is why in these last two Sundays in Advent we are given Gospels where St. John the Baptist is present.

In today's Gospel, St. John the Baptist sits in prison, and we hear our Lord + Jesus talk about the significance of St. John the Baptist's role in preparing men to receive the Lord. Next Sunday's Gospel, we hear from St. John the Baptist himself the words that he would preach to prepare our hearts to receive our Lord, and we hear him preach about the One Whose way he prepares. In other words, this week our Lord + Jesus speaks of St. John the Baptist, and next week St. John the Baptist speaks of our Lord + Jesus.

However, there is a twist. For, even though St. John the Baptist sits in prison, and is not in the scene, he still is preaching about Christ; he still is sending his disciples to the Lord so that they might hear of the works of Christ. He is still preaching from prison. For, what do his disciples learn when they go to ask the Lord whether He is the "Coming One" or if they should look for another? They are given precisely the answer that St. John the Baptist intended them to hear: they heard about the works of Christ.

What are those works of Christ? "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." These are the things which the Prophet Isaiah had prophesied about concerning the Messiah. When the Messiah came, He would do these things. The Lord + Jesus Christ was doing the things prophesied about by the Prophet Isaiah. He was doing the works of the Messiah. He was doing the works of the Christ. This was the only proof and sign that anyone was ever going to receive to answer the question about whether or not the Lord + Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. If you want proof the Lord + Jesus is the Messiah, the One sent from God to bear our flesh and be our Redeemer, than look to the works. The works of Christ are the proof and sign that He is the One sent by the Father to redeem mankind from all their sins.

This is what the Evangelist St. Matthew records concerning St. John the Baptist. He writes, "When John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples." St. John the Baptist had already heard that the Lord + Jesus was doing the works that the Messiah was supposed to be doing. Then why does he send his disciples to inquire of the Lord, whether He is the Coming One or not? This is usually the place in the sermon where the preacher relays the dilemma about whether St. John the Baptist is asking on his own behalf, or on behalf of his disciples. It makes for good theological debate, but it is also irrelevant. Whether it is for his benefit or his disciples' does not matter, because the focus should be on the works of Christ.

The Messiah foretold by the Isaiah, and all the rest of the prophets including St. John the Baptist, is doing what the Messiah is supposed to be doing. This brings comfort to everyone. It comforts St. John the Baptist, because he now knows that the works that he is hearing about in prison are being done by the Messiah. It comforts the disciples of John, because they also can bear witness to the signs, and now have the true Messiah before them to worship and praise. It also gives comfort to us and all those who hear this Gospel, because we are directed to the proof that the Lord + Jesus within Whom we rejoice is the Messiah prophesied about by all the prophets since the Garden of Eden.

This is why this day is called Gaudete, "rejoice." It is why the Introit begins by telling us to "Rejoice in the Lord always." For, we do not have only the testimony of our Lord + Jesus in words, but also in physical signs; in the blind and lame; in the lepers and deaf; and in the dead and poor we see the Messiah working to destroy the power of the devil, as He destroys the consequences of sin in this world, and attacks the devil's kingdom and stronghold by restoring all those who came or are brought to Him with health and life.

He heals us too with signs attached to His Word. In Holy Baptism and in His Supper—through water, bread and wine—He restores to us the eyes of faith to see Him as our Savior and gives our sin-crippled limbs the ability to give Him praise and thanks always; He cleanses us from the leprosy of sin and opens our ears to hear His holy Word; and He raises all those who believe on Him out of spiritual death into newness of life and preaches to us poor, miserable sinners that our sins have been forgiven by Him on account of His works. This is why even though St. John the Baptist was in prison, he had a reason to rejoice. This is why even though we may be trapped in the prison of this body of sin, we have a reason to rejoice.

His works save us. His great work of coming down from Heaven and taking on our flesh, so that He might fulfill the whole Law and will of God, and suffer and die in our place on the tree of the holy cross gives us reason to rejoice always in our Lord. When we cling to our Lord in faith, we receive the rewards which He won by His suffering and death on our behalf. And, there is even more reason to rejoice, because by the working of the Holy Ghost through the signs attached to His Word, He creates faith and life in us. The works of Christ give us life. Life eternal in Heaven. Life with Christ both here in this life and in the life to come. Life to dwell with other Christians who are eager to hear the voice of the prophet proclaiming the works of the Lord + Jesus Christ.

The multitudes went out into the wilderness to hear a prophet, even more than a prophet, for they went to hear the prophet prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. Today the same is true. Whenever multitudes of two or three are gathered together in the Name of Christ to hear about His works, there Christ is in the midst of them; there the prophet—the preacher of Christ—is proclaiming Him to all those who would repent and believe that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

The time for our Lord's coming is soon. The time when our Lord will come on the Last Day is near. The time when we will celebrate the Lord God being born in our flesh is only a little more than a week away. The time when our Lord comes to us in His Word and Sacraments is now. He has come to us now, and is present with us as He promised, fulfilling His works among us right now. We will even

commune with Him in a very short while. He will give to us of Himself, and we will receive forgiveness, life and salvation.

The forerunner is here to point your eyes to the Lord + Jesus. He is here to direct your eyes to the works of Christ, which win for you life and salvation. Listen to the prophet. Listen to what he has to preach. Listen to him as he gives you a reason to rejoice always: your sins have been forgiven, you have been gifted with an eternal life in Heaven, and you have been redeemed from the powers of sin, death and the devil. Rejoice in this, my dear Christian, rejoice in what the Lord + Jesus Christ has done for you. Believe on the works of Christ, and rejoice. Rejoice always that our Lord and Savior came down from Heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man for us, in order that we might share in His inheritance for all eternity. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.