

## 3rd Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday), Year B

### GOSPEL

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A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him.

He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?', he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, 'I am not the Christ.'

'Well then', they asked him, 'are you Elijah?'

'I am not,' he said.

'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?'

So John said, 'I am as Isaiah prophesied—a voice that cries in the wilderness: "Make straight a way for the Lord"'

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah and not the Prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you—unknown to you—the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal strap.' This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

(John 1:6–8, 19–28)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In the early years, there was rivalry between the disciples of John the Baptist and of Jesus. This gospel makes it clear that John does not see himself as a rival to Jesus but as a witness to him. It is Jesus who is the one sent from God.
- The quote from Isaiah comes from a section of his book that is addressed to the people in exile in Babylon in the sixth century BC. It is designed to bring comfort, and promises that when the paths are made straight, the Lord will be revealed.
- Bethany, as mentioned in this gospel text, is not the same town that was home to Mary, Martha and Lazarus. They lived close to Jerusalem, but the Bethany mentioned here lies on the east bank of the Jordan River.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

In contrast to last week's text on John the Baptist, this one comes from the last of the written gospels. The Gospel of John was penned at the very end of the first century. One common characteristic, however, is clear: the Baptist is again presented as the forerunner. John the Baptist rejects all messianic or quasi-messianic titles. He throws human expectation into chaos. He claims for himself only the role of the 'voice' of Isaiah 40, but the evangelist presents him as the most reliable of witnesses, 'Sent by God ... to speak for the light'. The only other person in John's Gospel to come from God is Jesus himself. Before an audience of the leaders of the religion of Israel, John witnesses with an authority and a truthfulness that has its source in God.

- In what ways can you speak with authority about Jesus?
- What truths have you come to recognise about Jesus?
- How do you give witness to Christ?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- In what ways can you witness to the light in your life?
- What actions are you taking this Advent to make straight the path for the Lord?
- 'What have you to say about yourself?' How might you answer this question at this stage in your journey?
- Have you ever been asked to be a witness to something or someone, or even perhaps to write a reference? How did you find that experience? Was it an easy or difficult task? Share your experiences with the group.
- Meditate on these words of Isaiah this week:

*The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me  
for the Lord has anointed me.*

*He sent me to bring good news to the poor,  
to bind up hearts that are broken.*

How can you do this?

- John came as a witness to the light of Christ. How does this light shine in you? Light a candle each time you pray this week.
- Bring light to someone's life this week by a visit, a phone call, a gesture ...

