

Awaiting Emmanuel

An Encounter with Christ

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10; James 5:7–10; Matthew 11:2–11

Do you know what to look for? John the Baptist wasn't sure. He thought Christ would arrive in a big way, like a king, and with fire, as he told his followers in last week's reading (see Mt 3:10, 12). But Jesus hadn't brought wrath, nor ax, nor winnowing fork.

He asked Jesus, by way of his disciples, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" (Mt 11:3).

Jesus responds by pointing out how the miracles and works he has performed have fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah (see Is 35:5–6). Those are pretty clear signs of he who is to come. But what do we have today to help us see Christ?

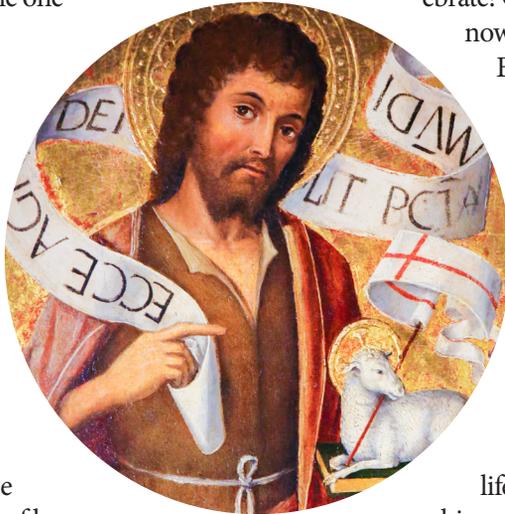
"Jesus is not a personage from the past; he is a person living today," Pope Francis said in his Easter Vigil homily on April 20, 2019. "We do not know him from history

books; we encounter him in life."

Today begins the third week of Advent, known as *Gaudete* (Latin for "rejoice") Sunday, and we light the rose-colored candle in the Advent wreath. "Rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord is near" (Phil 4:4,5).

What an amazing thing to celebrate! Christ is alive, even now. We are awaiting Emmanuel, recalling with joy his arrival as a humble infant and preparing with hope for the Second Coming. At the same time, we can keep watch for him in the daily acts of kindness, the miracle of life, and the beauty of his creation all around us.

Let us see Jesus *in all things* — in all of creation. When you come to know Christ, you can find him amid the sadness, hurt, and evil that still exist in the world today. And you can live out the joy of his promise that he will come again.



POINTS TO PONDER

- ▶ Where, in your daily life, is it more challenging to see Christ alive and at work?
- ▶ In what ways do you serve as a sign of Christ in the world today?
- ▶ Where did you see Jesus today?

Rejoice and Be Glad

"Go up onto a high mountain, / Zion, herald of good news! / Cry out at the top of your voice, / Jerusalem, herald of good news" (Is 40:9). "Sing out, heavens, and rejoice, earth, / break forth into song, you mountains / For the LORD comforts his people / and shows mercy to his afflicted" (Is 49:13). "Exult greatly, O daughter Zion! / Shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem! / Behold: your king is coming to you; / a just savior is he" (Zec 9:9).

Nor should we forget Nehemiah's exhortation: "Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD is your strength!" (Neh 8:10).





Meet St. John the Baptist

Even while John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus in return offered his friend the highest praise.

Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist, Jesus said (see Mt 11:11).

So who was this man whom Jesus held in such high esteem? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives us some background: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John’ [Jn 1:6]. John was ‘filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb’ [Lk 1:15] by Christ himself, whom the Virgin Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary’s visitation to Elizabeth thus became a visit from God to his people [Lk 1:68]” (717).

John became a prophet, drawing

large crowds to hear his preaching about the coming of Jesus. He was baptizing followers at the Jordan River when Jesus arrived and asked to be baptized. John believed himself unworthy to do this, but Jesus insisted. When Jesus arose from the water, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven like a dove. Those present then heard a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17).

Soon after, John was arrested for criticizing King Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife, Herodias. Angered by John’s disapproval and wanting to avenge her mother, Herodias’s daughter took advantage of Herod’s offer to grant a wish and asked for John’s head on a platter. John was beheaded in prison.

Keeping Watch *Together*

Signs of Jesus are all around. Consider these ways to grow more aware, as well as to bring evidence to others.

- Make it a habit after dinner to list the ways you or your family saw Christ in a person or a situation today. Be specific!
- Put technology to work. Set a reminder several times a day on your phone, laptop, or tablet to stop and consider what signs you might have seen in the world around you. If you spot something that calls to mind Our Lord, take a photo with your smartphone or jot a few words in your notes app.
- Look for the spaces in which Jesus’ love is needed and bring it. Defuse tension in angry circumstances. Offer the benefit of the doubt. Hold the door longer for the slower person walking behind you. Pick up trash or tidy a public space. Handle someone else’s chore for them.



An Advent Prayer

Jesus, thank you for your magnificent works that heal and bring hope. I’m opening my heart to the good news and great joy that you offer. May I provide an encounter of Christ to everyone I meet! Amen.

