

OUR LADY OF PROVIDENCE CHAPEL

SAINT VINCENT HOSPITAL
WORCESTER MEDICAL CENTER

Third Sunday of Advent
December 17, 2023



I am sending to you Elijah the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day...All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John. And if you are willing to accept it, [the Baptist] is Elijah, the one who is to come.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Weekday Mass: (Monday-Friday at 12 noon)

Weekend Masses: Saturday: 4:00pm - Sunday: 7:30am & 4:00pm

Holyday Mass Schedule: afternoon prior at 4:00pm

Holy day proper at 12 noon and 4:00pm

Confessions: First Saturday of every month at 3:30pm

Department Telephone: 508.363.6246

Chapel Website: www.ourladyofprovidence.net

MASS INTENTIONS — LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Saturday, December 16 *Vigil of the 3rd Sunday of Advent*

4:00pm +For the repose of the soul of Donald Maillet

Sunday, December 17 *Third (Gaudete) Sunday of Advent — Late Advent Begins*

7:30am +Beverly Adua—6th anniversary by her husband

4:00pm +John Sheeran by his daughter

Monday, December 18

12:00nn +Christopher Slattery

Tuesday, December 19

12:00nn For the intentions of Janice & Jack

Wednesday, December 20

12:00nn For priests, deacons, & vowed religious

Thursday, December 21 *Saint Peter Canisius, priest & doctor*²

12:00nn +Joanne Szaslan

Friday, December 22

12:00nn Asking God to bless Msgr. Richard Reidy by his friends

Saturday, December 23 *Vigil of the 4th Sunday of Advent*

4:00pm +For Rita & Charles Badzmirowski

Sunday, December 24 *Fourth Sunday of Advent*

7:30am +Mary Gray by her daughter

Christmas Eve: The Nativity of the Lord

4:00pm +Edward Manahan—14th anniversary by his wife

The Key to Understanding the Day's Liturgical Significance: **Sunday** is the day that the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery—the Lord's Day—which, according to apostolic tradition, is the day of Christ's Resurrection. The Sundays of Advent, Lent, and during the Easter Season take precedence over other celebrations. **Solemnities** honor significant religious events, beliefs or saints of the greatest importance and universal in their observance that begin at Vespers (or Evening Prayer) the day before. **Feasts** must be observed, though, less important than solemnities, hence, feasts are only observed on the natural day. **Memorials** are of two types: Either the observance is an **obligatory memorial**¹ or an **optional memorial**².

Toward a Better Understanding of This Sunday's Gospel

Of all the great prophets of Israel, the preaching of John the Baptist continues to echo down the ages to our own time. In the first chapter of Saint John's Gospel or the Prologue, while it serves as an introduction to the evangelist's principal concerns – life, light, truth, the world, testimony and the pre-existence of Christ, the incarnate Word (or Logos) who reveals God the Father—the Baptist is also mentioned. God sent John and entrusted him with a mission which entailed bearing witness to the coming Messiah. The role of Precursor or Forerunner links John with the Incarnation, though the fulfillment of that divine mission, eventually, would be accomplished by Christ. Saint John the Evangelist highlights the Baptist's relation to the Word-made-flesh than in the Synoptic Gospels. Yet, the hierarchy of the relationship between Jesus and the Baptist is clearly indicated and despite the declaration that John "was not the light, but came to testify to the light," Jesus declares that "among those born of women, there has been none greater than John the Baptist" (Mt 11:11). John's greatness acknowledged because he continually proclaimed the imminent dawning of the Kingdom, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 3:2). Given the public's response to John and his message, he must have attracted the attention of the priests and Levites in Jerusalem who sent messengers out to the desert to see, first-hand, what was going on. They asked him, "Who are you?" Unambiguously, John tells them who he is not – "I am not the Messiah." The prophet Elijah was expected to come again to anoint and manifest the Messiah. When the emissaries from Jerusalem ask him if he is Elijah, John answers, once again, "I am not." They finally ask him if he is the Prophet, but again John says no. This final request is baffling. The title prophet, with a lower case letter, occurs twice in the Fourth Gospel. Once it is used after the multiplication of the loaves, when the crowd declares that Jesus was "truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world" (Jn 6:14) and a second time when Jesus was in the Temple and talked about living water, "Some in the crowd who heard these words said, "This is truly the Prophet" (Jn 7:40). With Messianic expectation at a fever pitch, everything that John did created the impression that he might be the Messiah. So, he adamantly had to say that he was only a Precursor. Being pressed or harassed as to who he really was, while John may have been perturbed, he insistently said no to each inquiry. Frustrated, the delegates ask him, "What do you have to say for yourself?" Pressed to give a positive answer, he quotes the prophet Isaiah, "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord'" (Is 40:3). The citation squarely places John in a subordinate relation to Jesus. The final verse, while appearing to be merely descriptive has significant implications. Among the four Gospels, Saint John's Gospel highlights signs (Gk.

John the Baptist & the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls are ancient manuscripts, mostly written in Hebrew, that were accidentally found in 1947. In the more than 800 documents, those writings reveal that there were many Jews who were thinking eschatologically, preparing for the coming of the messianic age in the early first century. Known as Essenes, they apparently used language and performed rites similar to John the Baptist. For instance, in a striking parallel to the speech of John the Baptist recorded in the New Testament, there is this in one Dead Sea Scroll text labeled the *Rule of the Community*, "When such men as these come to be in Israel, conforming to these doctrines, they shall separate from the session of perverse men to go to the wilderness, there to prepare the way of truth, as it is written, 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God' [Is. 40:3]" (1QS 6:12-16). Likewise, we know that the Essene community, which is most likely to be identified in some way with the community who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, practices ritual washing, symbolizing cleansing from impurity and entrance into the New Covenant community.

σημεῖα) and what those signs imply or mean. Johannine signs are more commonly identified with the miracles associated with Jesus; thus, as actions replete with meaning, signs assume a sacramental nature. In addition to the Levites and priests, some Pharisees had come out to see what John was doing and they, too, were puzzled by the Baptist's denial of any messianic or prophetic role. John was baptizing "in Bethany across the Jordan" and he was baptizing *with water* and those latter words constitute a restriction. A dramatic pause is implied to follow those restrictive words and, so, the pause serves to elicit thoughts of the sacrament of baptism instituted by Christ. Elsewhere John noted that he offered a baptism of repentance, but there was Someone among them who was unknown to them who would soon be revealed. Between John's public life and that of the Lord's there is not identity but continuity and organic development. As a witness to the Light and not the Light itself, John is the humble Precursor. Even John did not know who the Messiah was and only at the theophany at the Jordan River, when the Spirit alighted on Jesus, did he begin to realize who Jesus really was. In the verse subsequent to this Gospel (Jn 1:21-33), John elaborates on his earlier ignorance of the Messiah's identity and that seeing the Spirit come upon Jesus revealed to John that Jesus was the Messiah, "I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit'" (Jn 1:33). This all occurred on the day after John testified about who he was not before those envoys sent from Jerusalem. Seeing Jesus coming toward him, John declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. He is the one of whom I said, 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me'" (Jn 1:29-30). On the third day, after again declaring Jesus to be the Lamb of God, John sent two of his own disciples to follow where Jesus was going. One of the two was Andrew, who after accepting Jesus' invitation to "Come and...see," eagerly went to find Simon Peter his brother and told him, "We have found the Messiah." In the Fourth Gospel, the mystery surrounding who is the Messiah is unraveled by the Baptist who the evangelist describes as "a burning and shining lamp." By telling the Pharisees that, though unrecognized, the Messiah could already be found among them, John's role as the authentic Precursor to the coming of Christ is confirmed. The Baptist diligently prepared himself to be ready to recognize the Messiah when He finally came and allowed Jesus to reveal Himself on His own terms and at the ideal time.

National Eucharistic Revival - Phase Three: The Mission Phase Beginning 30 May 2024

Each year, during Advent, the Church hastens to meet the Lord in the threefold sense of Christ's coming: in history, in mystery and in majesty. Those three senses mean in Bethlehem, in Communion, and at the general or particular judgment. Saint Athanasius of Alexandria wrote, "...through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection (*De incarnatione*). The Lord comes to His disciples in mystery, when He is received in Holy Communion. In a sermon to the neophytes, Saint Augustine said, "Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross, and in the cup what flowed from his side." The Bishop of Hippo also taught that the Eucharist is a means to sanctity, particularly through joining our sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Then, in Christ coming in majesty, our thoughts are directed to the power and glory that will mark His Second Coming. This final sense of Advent waiting offers a sense of peace to the restlessness that often accompanies human anticipation. Thus, Christ's return is an end to the anxieties and yearnings for true healing and wholeness resulting from the brokenness and pain of the world that is held out as a future blessing. However, there is more yet to come, despite creation groaning in suffering. The world is moving toward some omega point where all is complete and fulfilled. Preparing for Christ to come in majesty illuminates for us that the aching accompanying incompleteness is not misguided, but that it is a creative hunger through which God can further His work of salvation in the world. As late Advent dawns, the Church begins a more immediate preparation for Christmas seeking to create hearts that are increasingly ready to see in the Child of Bethlehem, the King who will come in glory, when the time is ripe and look forward to His kingdom being fulfilled in majesty.

Chapel Mass Schedule for Christmas

Sunday, December 24 Christmas Eve Mass at 4pm

Monday, December 25: Masses at 7:30am & 12nn

Schedule for New Year's Day

Not a mandatory holy day of obligation

Sunday, December 31 at 4:00pm

Monday, January 1, 2024 at 12nn & 4pm



ADVENT - A JOURNEY TOWARDS BETHLEHEM & THE PAROUSIA OR SECOND COMING

According to the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year*, "The weekdays from December 17 up to and including December 24 are ordered in a more direct way (Lat. *modo magis directo*) to preparing for the Nativity of the Lord" (*UNLYC*, n. 42). The two-fold character of Advent entails a preparation for Christmas and the first coming of the Son of God, but it is also directed by that memorial to Christ's Second Coming or parousia. Advent is not primarily a season of penance as a preparation for the general judgment, but a festive observance, based upon the Incarnation, and a joyous expectation of the Lord's return in glory. The late Trappist priest Father Thomas Merton, in a 1963 article entitled, "Advent: Hope or Delusion," which was later published and incorporated in the book *Seasons of Celebration: Meditations on the Cycle of Liturgical Feasts*, challenges the Church to think more deeply about what it is that is being commemorated when we celebrate Advent and then Christmas. His central issue is wondering if during this holy season do we embrace authentic hope: "In Advent we celebrate the coming and indeed the presence of Christ in our world. We witness to His presence even in the midst of all its inscrutable problems and tragedies. Our Advent faith is not an escape from the world to a misty realm of slo-gans and comforts which declare our problems to be unreal, our tragedies inexistent."

Hope & Advent

The mystical hope offers us an experience of trust that God's presence, love, and mercy is in and all around us, regardless of circumstances or future outcome. In *Preparing for Christmas: Daily Meditations for Advent*, Father Richard Rohr writes of such hope through our anticipation of Jesus' coming during Advent. *Come, Lord Jesus*, the Advent mantra, means that all of Christian history has to live out of a kind of deliberate emptiness, a kind of chosen non-fulfillment. Perfect fullness is always to come, and we do not need to demand it now. The theological virtue of hope keeps the field of life wide open and especially open to grace and to a future created by God rather than ourselves. This is exactly what it means to be "awake," as the Gospel urges us! We can also use other a words for Advent: aware, alive, attentive, alert are all appropriate. Advent is, above all else, a call to full consciousness and also a forewarning about the high price of consciousness. "Come, Lord Jesus" is a leap into the kind of freedom and surrender that is rightly called the virtue of hope. Hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without full closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our satisfaction is now at another level, and our Source is beyond ourselves. We are able to trust that Christ will come again, just as Christ has come into our past, into our private dilemmas, and

into our suffering world. Our Christian past then becomes our Christian prologue, and "Come, Lord Jesus" is not a cry of desperation but an assured shout of cosmic hope.

The O Antiphons

The O Antiphons are mentioned as early as the sixth century A.D., and they had entered common use in liturgical celebrations in Rome by the eighth century. For almost fifteen-hundred years, the Church has invoked the titles of Christ in the O Antiphons, seven ancient prayers. Like a final crescendo, these O Antiphons are intoned during Vespers or Evening Prayer on the seven days leading up to Christmas Eve or as the Gospel verse. Each night the antiphons form luminous bookends around Our Lady's Magnificat, like seven prayers she prayed during her week-long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. All seven are in the oracles of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who gives us many memorable images of the Messiah. They are rich meditations on the One who is to come. They are seven heart cries for Jesus to come anew in our lives. Each one of them is preparing us to invite the Christ Child more completely in during this blessed season. Each antiphon is based on a different title for Jesus taken from the Old Testament—titles like Emmanuel, Key of David, Day-spring, and Wisdom. When gathered together, as they are in the hymn O Come O Come Emmanuel, these titles give voice to the Israelites' longing for the Messiah, as well as our own longing for Jesus to come—both at Christmas and at the Second Coming. The simple evocative "O" emphasizes the sense of desire, even awe, that surrounds them. We are not simply asking Jesus for a favor, we are expressing a deep longing in our hearts. Since the O Antiphons highlight different titles for the Messiah, they help open our eyes to who Jesus is. They testify that Jesus is both God and man. He has power over heaven and earth and that He is the wisdom of God and the desire of every person's heart. Each antiphon concludes with a plea for Jesus to do some powerful work in the world when He does come. For instance, the first antiphon asks Jesus to come and teach us "the way to salvation." The second antiphon asks Jesus: "stretch out your mighty hand to set us free." So we are asking Jesus not just to come but to bring us more deeply into the freedom that He won for us when He first came two thousand years ago.

December 17 come teach us the way to salvation

December 18 come rescue us with your mighty power!

December 19 come to save us without delay!

December 20 come and free the prisoners of darkness!

December 21 come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 22 come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!

December 23 come to save us, Lord our God!