

**OUR LADY OF PROVIDENCE CHAPEL**  
**SAINT VINCENT HOSPITAL**  
**WORCESTER MEDICAL CENTER**  
**Second Sunday of Advent**  
**December 10, 2023**



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John the Baptist was more than a reed shaking in the wind –  
John was a tall oak tree casting his shadow on subsequent generations.  
The Precursor was more than a prophet – no one born of women was greater than John.

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**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](http://www.ourladyofprovidence.net)

## **MASS INTENTIONS — LITURGICAL SCHEDULE**

Saturday, December 9 *Vigil of the 2nd Sunday of Advent*

4:00pm For the conversion of Larry & Sally

Sunday, December 10 *Second Sunday of Advent*

7:30am For the conversion of the Whalen family

4:00pm +George and Felice Burns

Monday, December 11 *Saint Damasus I, pope*<sup>2</sup>

12:00nn For the intentions of Janet and Bridget

Tuesday, December 12 *Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*

12:00nn For the holy innocents, born and unborn

Wednesday, December 13 *Saint Lucy, virgin & martyr*<sup>1</sup>

12:00nn For the conversion of the State House

Thursday, December 14 *Saint John of the Cross, priest & doctor*<sup>1</sup>

12:00nn For all the unbaptized

Friday, December 15

12:00nn For the priests serving the Diocese of Worcester

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 Sunday of Advent — Gaudete Sunday*

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

4:00pm +John Sheeran by his daughter

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<sup>1</sup> or an optional memorial<sup>2</sup>.*

### **Toward a Better Understanding of This Sunday's Gospel**

Each year, on the Second Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist becomes the focus of the Gospel. John is both prophet and precursor and relentless in pursuing his mission, though humble to the utmost degree. Never does the Baptist do or say anything that would unduly attract attention to himself. He exemplifies that dual role, today, when he declares, "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals." Such a self-effacing attitude yields enormous serenity to John, an attitude that is the hallmark of every true prophet. As the greatest of prophets and privileged messenger of the Messiah, John was to prepare the way. In the prophecies from Isaiah and Malachi, the Precursor must clear a pathway for the Lord and do so in the wilderness, making a smooth desert highway for the Lord (Is 40:3). Malachi (Mal 3:1) foretold that a messenger would arrive ahead in order to make way for the coming Messiah. Saint Matthew applies what Malachi said to the Baptist (Mt 11:10) as well as the prophecy of Isaiah (Mt 3:3). Later on, Matthew identifies John with Elijah (Mt 11:14; see Mal 3:23). When those references are taken together, the Baptist would prepare the way for the coming of the Lord in glory and fulfilled the promise that God would send another Elijah before the Messiah arrives in order to turn the people to repentance (Mal 3:23-24). Each and every time, John never fails to do whatever is necessary to "prepare the way of the Lord," while fading into the background afterwards. Like the unprofitable servant, he did only what he was obliged to do – he fulfilled the mission which was what he had set out to do. John's clothing was "camels hair" (Gk. τρίχες καμήλου), with a leather belt around his waist and a diet of "locusts and wild honey" that echoed how the prophet Elijah dressed (2 Kgs 1:8). Moreover, those aspects confirmed John's mission as another Elijah by preparing the Messiah's way and calling the people to repentance. A biblical understanding of repentance can be illustrated by the Greek and Hebrew words that constitute its linguistic foundation. The Hebrew word *shuv* (or *shub*) is sometimes translated as repentance but it is better understood as turning to God in response to His call. Spiritually understood, then, *shuv* is a practical turning away from evil and turning toward the good. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, known as the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek word *strepho* (Gk. στρέφω) became the equivalent of *shuv* and meant to turn around or turn back to God. Another Hebrew word *nacham* is often associated with the emotion of regret or to denote being sorry. Linguists theorize that the root of *nacham* would find God taking a deep breath or even sighing as an expression of divine regret or because of a feeling of divine compassion in response to an offense inflicted by others. In Genesis

## The Divine Milieu

We are constantly forgetting that the supernatural is a ferment, a soul, and not a complete and finished organism. Its role is to transform *nature*; but it cannot do so apart from the matter which nature provides it with. If the Jewish people have remained turned towards the Messiah for three thousand years, it is because he appeared to them to enshrine the glory of their people. If the disciples of St. Paul lived in perpetual expectation of the great day, that was because it was to the Son of Man that they looked for a personal and tangible solutions to the problems and the injustices of life. The expectation of heaven cannot remain alive unless it is incarnate.

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6:6, you would read that God consoled Himself (racham=comfort) by changing His thinking and plan. Divine regret was God's answer or the response to sinful behavior. Nacham, when applied to human activity, yields regret over sin that is manifested as a state of sorrow. In the Greek Septuagint, nacham was typically translated by *metanoia* (Gk. μετάνοια) or, at times, *metamelouai* (Gk. μεταμέλομαι). The latter expression is a compound word, *meta* (after or with) and *noeo* (to think) and, so, changing your thinking or to also go beyond (meta) your thinking is necessary to access the realm of the heart. Metanoia implies that how we think will affect the decisions made (judgments) and, so, the expression is an acknowledgement that the acting agent was cognitively mistaken about the nature of morality (i.e., divinely-sanctioned moral order). Obviously guilty of that violation, the perpetrator is in a state of profound alienation until divinely reconciled. Change of mind or metanoia—if it is genuine—leads to a change of heart. Called the Baptist, John required those who came out into the desert to hear him preach to undergo “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” This purpose was affirmed by Saint Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, when in Ephesus he encountered some disciples baptized by John and said, “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus” (Acts 19:4). John's baptism implied repentance or for those who were baptized to change their way of thinking and, then, to set out into an entirely new direction. This form of baptism meant to acknowledge oneself as a sinner, to desire to be cleansed from sin, and a renewed commitment to following the Mosaic Law in anticipation of the Messiah's imminent arrival. The human scene and the ecclesiastical setting is not always positively disposed to prophets, though their clarion call for conversion of heart and mind can never be silenced. The reason for prophets arising in our midst is because when they are carbon copies of John the Baptist, there you have another new beginning to the gospel message. At the center of all authentic renewal, you will always find a prophet's voice, who does not speak on his own, but does so enlightened by the Spirit.

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

In his book *Eschatology*, at that time known as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “By gazing on the risen Christ, Christianity knew that a most significant coming had already taken place. It no longer proclaimed a pure theology of hope, living from mere expectation of the future, but pointed to a ‘now’ in which the promise had already become present. Such a present was, of course, itself hope, for it bears the future within itself” (*Eschatology*, 44-45). Scholars think the word *adventus* is a translation of the Greek word *parousia*. *Parousia* is usually connected to the second coming of Christ. Prior to the Christian era, *advent* or *parousia* was the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (ca. 37-100AD), sometimes used *parousia* when speaking of God coming to Israel's rescue. For many years prior to the birth of the Child Jesus, the Israelites had been longing for God's intervention as they suffered under the domination of various empires, this time under Roman rule. The Messiah was their hope. The Hebrew Scriptures or our Old Testament were laced with longing and hope. The penultimate words of the Bible are a prayer for the Messiah's Second Coming in glory: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20). However, Jesus also promised this, “behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). In that sense, then, *parousia* also refers to the continual coming of Christ—His ongoing presence to the Church. An important aspect of the Catholic sense of Jesus' continual coming is in the understanding of the liturgy. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, liturgy is “the participation of the People of God in ‘the work of God’” (CCC, n.1069). God invites His people to celebrate and participate in His work. Principally, the work that we celebrate and participate in is the Paschal mystery. As the *Catechism* says, God “accomplished this work principally by the Paschal mystery of his blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead, and glorious Ascension” (CCC, n. 1067). Often when discussing the Paschal mystery, the focus is squarely on the suffering, death, and Resurrection of our Lord. However, without mentioning the Lord's Ascension, it is easy to think of the Paschal mystery as solely a past reality. The beauty of not being relegated the Ascension to another category but to unite it intimately with Christ's suffering, death, and Resurrection, is that according to St. Thomas Aquinas, “the Ascension is the cause of our salvation” (ST III, q.57, a.6). The *Catechism* links Jesus' Ascension with His presence in the Church—His *parousia*—as well: “Taken up to heaven and glorified after he had thus fully accomplished his mission, Christ dwells on earth in his Church” (CCC, n. 669). The Church becomes the Body of Christ through the Paschal mystery—including the Ascension. Above all else, in the contemporary realm, Christ is supremely present in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist that is rooted in the Last Supper, where Jesus shared bread and wine with His disciples and instructed them to do the same in remembrance of Him. The Eucharist is seen as a way for faithful Catholics to participate in Christ's sacrifice and to receive His grace and salvation.



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

According to the late Father John Meier in a series labeled *A Marginal Jew* II, John the Baptist had a life before Jesus, and there is good evidence that John's movement continued long after Jesus. The Gospel of John is the only one that states that John had disciples of his own, and even more remarkably, the Baptist is depicted as encouraging two of them, including one named Andrew, to go off and join Jesus as disciples of the Lord (Jn 1:40). In the New Testament, in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 19: 1-7), Paul comes across a community of the baptized who tell him, "We have never even heard that there is a holy Spirit." Paul deduces that those are followers of John, now long dead, suggesting that John's message and ministry was a true entity unto itself. The Baptist is not mentioned on the First and Fourth Sundays of Advent, but he is a major figure on this season's Second and Third Sundays.

While Jesus remains the central focus, during the middle weekends of Advent, John the Baptist serves a crucial, supporting role. This week's Gospel is taken from the first chapter of Saint Mark's account (Mk 1:1-8). Unlike the other two Synoptic Gospels, Mark has no infancy narrative and, so, it begins with John and Jesus meeting as adults. The description of John—the rugged solitary figure who lives off the land and attracts large crowds with his call to repentance is Mark's description of John, whom he identifies as "the Baptist." In doing so, the evangelist draws upon the prophecies of Isaiah, the precursor going ahead to prepare the way of the Lord. Mark's Christology or his understanding of Jesus is that of One who has come to usher in the new day of the Kingdom of God. The Markan account of the Baptist fits very well with that understanding of Jesus. The evangelist offers no insight into the relationship between John and Jesus prior to the baptism, nor does he speak of the two men encountering each other afterwards. Yet, Mark is the only evangelist who provides a lengthy narrative of the death of John (Mk 6:17-29), who was beheaded, reluctantly, by King Herod. Interestingly, when Herod eventually came to hear about Jesus and his works and speculate about His identity, Herod comments, "It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up" (Mk 6:16).

### Elijah – John the Baptist - Jesus

Advent really should take on the character and personality of John the Baptist. You could consider John to be Elijah redivivus or brought back to life. So, Advent can be framed as John redivivus. John proclaimed repentance and, so, Advent's veiled penitential nature is revealed by the Baptist's preaching. It is no surprise that John appeared wearing a coat of camel's hair. Elijah was the only Old Testament prophet to dress in that way (2 Kgs 1:8). Jesus would later explain how Elijah had come before Him in the person of John the Baptist

(Mt 17:10-13). The period known as the time of prophetic silence stretched roughly from the life of the prophet Malachi to the appearance of John the Baptist. During that time, there had been no prophetic utterances in Israel for hundreds of years, so people were thrilled at the prospect that a prophet had appeared during their lifetime. If the Baptist truly was what had been claimed about him—a prophet and the return of Elijah—John's message must have stirred up latent messianic fervor. When he preached out in the desert, Jerusalem was almost a ghost town because the citizens went out in great numbers to the desert, a traditional place of encounter with God, to hear what this exceptional man of God had to say. John cried out, "Prepare the way of the Lord" (Mk 1:3). This message, though ever-old for the crowds two thousand years ago, remains ever-new even now. During this Advent season we should prepare the way of the Lord, clear away any obstacle that would prevent Jesus from coming to us, so that when the Child does appear on Christmas, the Baby in the manger will have unimpeded access to every human heart. John also preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mk 1:4). John wanted the people who listened to him to renounce sin, be washed of their past impurities, and be in the state of grace when the Messiah would appear. Likewise, in these weeks as the Church prepares for Christmas, if anyone wants to be well prepared for that solemn feast, it is wise to heed John's call: To renounce sin, confess our sins, in order to be in a state of grace on Christmas when we commemorate the Lord's first coming. The Baptist kept Jesus first above all things (Jn 3:30) and the same priority should direct our lives until the Holy Night. Elijah is the most frequently mentioned figure from the Hebrew scriptures in the Gospel of Mark, yet, despite Elijah's unusual prominence, relatively little has been written on the matter. In the Markan account, Jesus is associated with Elijah redivivus. Elijah himself appears at Jesus' transfiguration and in a discourse with the disciples the Lord strongly implies that Elijah has already come in the person of John the Baptist (Mt 11:14). Furthermore, both John and Jesus show literary similarities to the historical and eschatological Elijah. After the transfiguration, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? He said in reply, "Elijah will indeed come and restore all things: but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased. So also will the Son of Man suffer at their hands" (Mt 17:9-12). The disciples understood that Jesus was speaking to them of John the Baptist. In the book entitled *The Life of Christ*, Abp. Fulton Sheen said, "...every other person who ever came into this world came into live. [Jesus] came into it to die." Maranatha!