

3rd Sunday in Advent December 15, 2019

Year A – the Gospel of Matthew

Also known as Gaudete Sunday (Latin for "Rejoice") or Rose Sunday

Living the Lutheran Lectionary

A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.

An opportunity to make Sunday worship more meaningful and to make the rhythms of the readings part of the rhythms of your life.

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<http://carolinasnalc.org/2014/12/19/december-19-2014/>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 345 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 60

"Hark, a thrilling voice is sounding"

Scripture References: st. 1 = Rom. 13:11-12 st. 2 = 2 Pet. 1:19 st. 3 = John 1:29 st. 4 = Luke 21:25-28 st. 5 = Rev. 5:13 Although earliest manuscript copy dates from the tenth century, this text is possibly as old as the fifth century. It is based on the Latin hymn "Vox clara ecce intonat" and its 1632 revision "En clara vox redarguit." ...

The hymn is most useful for Advent because it permits various interpretations of Christ's coming. Stanzas 1-3 contain references to Christ's first coming, but they can be used to celebrate his second coming as well. Stanza 4 surely refers to the second coming, and stanza 5, the only stanza addressed to God, is a doxology.... --*Psalter Hymnal Handbook*

- https://hymnary.org/text/hark_a_thrilling_voice_is_sounding
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCrEt11-SFU> "Sung by the Plymouth Choir and Congregation of First Plymouth Church, Lincoln Nebraska...Arrangement by Richard Webster
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKC1zCaAE_o St John's, Detroit, MI [HIMaachen](#)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZnabxcayqc> An arrangement of Hark! A Thrilling Voice is Sounding by Paul van der Bijl and Jason Reed and recorded at Covenant Presbyterian Church of Chicago (PCA)... Listen to the album here: <http://chicagometropreschristmas.band...>

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

O.T.– “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God ...will come and save you.”
Psalm – “I will praise the LORD as long as I live”
Epistle – “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.”
Gospel – “***Go and tell John what you hear and see***”

Isaiah 35:1-10; Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), the same reading (Next week: Isaiah 7:10-17; RCL, Isaiah 17:10-16)

This is one of those texts for which many of the hearers will know not only the words but the tune, because it stands behind the well-known alto recitative in George Frideric Handel's Messiah (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-eCWcnGQRs>)

"Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened." For these people, the preacher's challenge will be to help them hear it afresh...

The prophet has taken great care with these verses (one might say that as a student he got all A's in poetry). They are marked by a concentric structure that is quite common to Hebrew poetry-and which might require a very brief explanation: both individual verses and longer units

of text can be marked by something like an a-b-b-a or a-b-c-d-c-b-a pattern. Today's passage (vv. 1-7) begins and ends with a focus on creation. The desert and the wilderness, typical of the ancient near Eastern landscape, are being transformed: the desert blossoms, becoming as fertile as those rare watered areas, Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon (vv. 1-2); the arid sands become a luscious garden (vv. 6b-7). How can this be, hearers might wonder; and to what end. The preacher should first simply let people appreciate the transformation: Look! A dry wasteland is becoming a green paradise. Steven Spielberg could provide the special effects. (Now, to be sure, deserts belong to God, too, along with the various creatures of the desert; and they too are created good. Remember, that the text is poetry, not an ecology textbook. Let it be poetry, and go with the wonder of it.) (continued after the reading)

35 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;

² it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!

Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.

He will come and save you.”

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.

It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.^[a]

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

a. [Isaiah 35:8](#) Or if they are fools, they shall not wander in it

“But let's look inside those bookends of the text that focus on creation. In the next layer of the passage, human beings are also being transformed: hands, knees, and hearts are made strong (vv. 3-4a); eyes, ears, limbs, and tongue are healed (vv. 5-6a). (Note that seven elements are mentioned: the transformation is complete!) Again, amazing things are happening. Revel in them. Appreciate the possibility of the removal of pain, the healing of all that stands in the way of song and dance. (And again, the text is poetry, not a discourse on the place and possibilities of disability. Hear it for what it wants to say, not for what it doesn't say. There are other biblical texts for another day to speak about issues of social justice and disability.)

But what is going on here? And how? In this case, the key comes in the middle. At the center of the concentric circles that describe the restoration of creation and humanity is God: "Here is your God," announces the prophet (v. 4b)-God coming with power to overcome the wickedness, disease, and disorder that stand in the way of God's breathtaking new age. The structure, then, is this: creation-humanity-God-humanity-creation (a-b-c-b-a). At the center is God, who comes to "save." Among other things, this text helps us understand what it means to "be saved" in the Bible-not at all something that pertains only to individual souls, but rather a transformation of humanity and creation that enables all to sing together in present and eternal joy.

God, says the text, is the one with power to transform creation and humanity-and, look, here he comes! This is not an abstract or even eternal truth; it is a present announcement: God is showing up. Watch what happens!..."

➤ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=10 [Fred Gaiser](#) Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

Psalm 146; RCL, Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:46b-55 (Psalm 24; RCL, Psalm 8:1-7, 17-19)

Psalm 146 is also used in Pentecost on Sundays of Year B, Propers 18 and 27.

"Psalm 146 is the first of the five great Hallel (praise) Psalms (146-150) that conclude the book of Psalms.

All five psalms begin and conclude with the refrain, "Praise the LORD!" (verses 1a, 10b). The words gather together themes worthy of praise to the God present in the Torah, the prophets, and the writings. The lectionary selection includes only verses 5-10, and unfortunately leaves off verses 1-4, which set the tone of praise in the psalm and lead into the verses that follow in our text.

The psalmist begins with the acclamation of praise to the Lord with all of one's life. In the season of Advent we draw near to the way in which God has manifested salvation in the birth of the Messiah, and we too proclaim, "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul" (verse 1). With the psalmist, we too live out our lives continually in the presence of the God who has given us the gift of life and salvation every day: "I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long" (verse 2)..."

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=785 [Paul S. Berge](#) Emeritus Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn

Put Not Your Trust in Princes

146 Praise the LORD! (Hallelujah!)

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

² I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³ Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

⁴ When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;

on that very day his plans perish.

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD his God,

⁶ who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,

who keeps faith forever;

⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed,

who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰ The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD! (Hallelujah!)

“Psalm 146 is structurally simple, yet theologically profound.

Its genre is one of praise and it is part of the crescendo ending of the psalter. The psalm begins and ends with the same “Praise the LORD” or “Hallelujah,” providing an envelope called an “inclusio.” Inside this envelope are two doxologies surrounding two stanzas, giving a symmetrical shape to this prayer.

The first doxology is personal and enduring and better translated as “I will praise God with my whole self” instead of the standard “soul.” “Soul” provides a meaning of an inner devotion or that the “soul” is something other than the self. The prayer calls for us to involve our whole selves in the life-long act of praise to the LORD. It is a call to action...

The first stanza (Psalm 146:3-4) changes direction abruptly. The move from praise to “do not trust” is a harsh one. But the stanza is a reminder. We are not to place our trust in humans, even human leaders. Notice, the psalm makes no distinction as to the nature of the leader. The leader may be good or bad, his or her merits are not the point, rather their human condition is. Leaders, like all humans, will come and then go to the ground and all of their plans will go with them... Life-long praise and trust are reserved for the LORD alone.

The next stanza (verses 5-9) returns focus to the one praying. It opens with the Hebrew *‘asher*, often translated as “happy.” In the context of a praise psalm, this definition works as long as we remember it is not a passing or superficial happiness, but a deep abiding “contentment” with the human condition and one’s God. It is life as it is supposed to be and it is achieved by having God as one’s “help” and “hope.” This is the contrast to the stanza above. If happiness is elusive, contentment may even be more difficult...

And what a God we serve! God is Creator of the heavens, the earth, and the seas (v 6). God is the Sustainer who keeps faith (in Hebrew the word also means “truth” and “firmness”) forever (v 6), and God is the Redeemer who rescues those who are oppressed and hungry (v 7). These attributes serve two purposes. The first is to remind us why God is to be praised for our whole lives and the other is to provide additional contrast to those human rulers. God and God alone is the reason for our creation and continued existence. The psalm adds five ways of the LORD, all centered on God’s justice (vv 8-9a). One can imagine that as each line is read or sung, it is followed by a resounding response of praise. The psalm concludes a final doxology celebrating God’s enduring presence in the world and a final shout of “Hallelujah.”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2676 Beth L. Tanner Professor of Old Testament, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, NJ

“An Aside on the Magnificat

The (RCL) lectionary offers the Magnificat (Luke 1:46b-55) as an optional psalm. The connection between God’s deeds praised here in Psalm 146 and God’s deeds praised by the teenaged Mary of Nazareth is easily discerned. But the Magnificat appears to notch things up a level. In the Magnificat, God is praised not only for lifting up the lowly and satisfying the hungry, but also for putting down the mighty and sending the rich away empty-handed. Meanwhile, Psalm 146:5-10 appears content to thank God for bringing the wicked “to ruin” regardless of socioeconomic rank....”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1955 [Hans Wiersma](#)
Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN

James 5:7-11; RCL, James 5:7-10 (Romans 1:1-7; RCL, the same reading)

“Many scriptural texts can be read in isolation of their context and still provide some meaning.

However, some texts, like these verses from James, benefit greatly from reading what precedes it (if not orally in the congregation then at least in the pastor's sermon preparation). James is looking forward, to the future, with hope. But what is this hope? And what does this hope mean for the community of faith on the Third Sunday of Advent?

The past two Sundays, the community has heard the readings from the final chapters of Romans where Paul is developing what it means to live like a Christian, led and molded by the Holy Spirit. Is James now proposing that we simply "hope" for some future coming, eyes directed heavenward, as if we did not have to be concerned about this life? Definitely not! The key passage that eliminates a pie-in-the-sky hope (waiting for Jesus to return on the clouds of heaven and make everything "right") is verse 9, "Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged." Our hope may actually be judged! What type of hope is James writing about, what type of hope will pass the judgment?

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=800 [Dirk G. Lange](#) Fredrik A. Schiotz, Chair of Missions and Professor of Worship, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.

Warning to the Rich: verses 1-6

Patience in Suffering

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers,^[a] until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of

the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

The Prayer of Faith: verses 13-20

- a. [James 5:7](#) Or *brothers and sisters*; also verses [9](#), [10](#), [12](#), [19](#)
- b. [James 5:16](#) Or *The effective prayer of a righteous person has great power*

“...To read the Letter of James on the Third Sunday of Advent is to be called back both to ourselves and to our great hope. He does so by first directing our attention to the human realities and everyday choices that shape our lives and give rise to the structures and values that determine the shape of our world. For this reason the letter stands out among the writings of the New Testament with its overriding concern for ethics and the life of faith that is lived in community.

In a culture dominated by the valuation of power and the accumulation of wealth, and largely driven by envy of those who possess both, James calls readers to follow an alternative way, one rooted in friendship with God rather than the world. He invites his readers to live in community that is free from envy and expressed by the kind of speech and action that is born of the wisdom that comes “from above.” This way of living is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy” (James 4:17). By arguing that “conflicts and disputes” (4:1) emerge from “friendship with the world” (4:4), James reminds us that what we value shapes who we are, both individually and collectively.

To read James in the season of Advent is to take time to pause, reflect, and recognize where in our lives we are unprepared to welcome Christ anew, and what values and choices have closed us off to Christ’s presence in our midst.

James’s letter also reminds us to be aware of the suffering that is caused by the world’s corrosive and corrupting values. When James exhorts his readers to wait for the coming of the Lord, he not only instructs them to wait with patience, he presupposes that they are doing so in the midst of suffering.

Here James infuses the celebration of Advent with a hard truth. It is the suffering of those who bear the weight of oppression that gives meaning to waiting for the coming of the Lord (James 5:7) in the first place...

Reading James in the rhythm of the liturgical year is a corrective that cuts through the distractions of the “holiday season” and calls our attention back to Advent. James reminds us that this liturgical season of preparation is also a season of repentance and penance that must take seriously the suffering in our midst. Waiting patiently for the day of the Lord is, as James’ entire letter suggests, a time for recognizing the values that shape our lives and communities and recalibrating them, as need be, so that they may be in accord with the wisdom that is from above.”

- https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4298 **Mary Foksett** Wake Forest Kahle Professor of Religious Studies, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N.C.

Matthew 11:2-15; Matthew 11:2-11 (Matthew 1:18-25; RCL, the same reading)

“So far our Advent lessons have taught us to prepare to celebrate both the past and the future - to celebrate both the birth of Jesus 2,000 years ago, and to heighten our anticipation of his coming anew at a date and time no one knows for certain.

*And they have stressed the importance of inner preparation - aligning our attitudes and behaviours with God's desires for all, and not just busying ourselves with tidying the house. Today's lesson cuts to the heart of the matter, and asks **THE** question that every follower of Jesus in every age must ask:*

Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

- <https://www.holytextures.com/2010/11/matthew-11-2-11-year-a-advent-3-sermon.html> Sermon by The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson, the director of the Madawaska Institute of Culture and Religion, Ontario Canada

“The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 11th Chapter”

Messengers from John the Baptist: verse 1-19

11 When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, **“Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers^[a] are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”**

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: **“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man^[b] dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet?^[c] Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written,**

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.” [Cited from Mal. 3:1](#)

11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence,^[d] and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear,^[e] let him hear.

16 “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,

17 “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”^[f]

Woe to Unrepentant Cities and Come to Me, and I Will Give You Rest continues next week.

- a. [Matthew 11:5](#) Leprosy was a term for several skin diseases; see [Leviticus 13](#)
- b. [Matthew 11:8](#) Or *Why then did you go out? To see a man...*
- c. [Matthew 11:9](#) Some manuscripts *Why then did you go out? To see a prophet?*
- d. [Matthew 11:12](#) Or *has been coming violently*
- e. [Matthew 11:15](#) Some manuscripts omit *to hear*

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

“The question of John the Baptist to Jesus is one of the most important questions of Advent and of Christian theology more broadly.

“Are you the one who is come, or are we to wait for another?” (Matthew 11:3).

We need to qualify the question from the perspective of the first century. Not all Jewish communities were oriented to the end-times, and not all anticipated a messianic figure. One Jewish community (Qumran) seemed to envision two messianic figures. Moreover, end-time Jewish communities debated the nature, identity, and activity of God’s final end-time agent. John was not the only one asking, with wider reference, “Are you the one?”

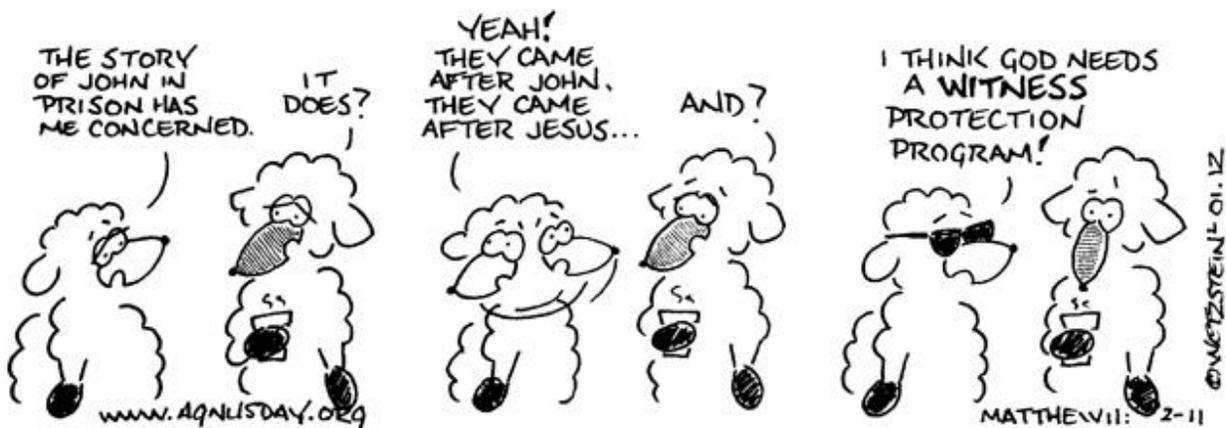
The Gospel according to Matthew steps into the middle of this debate. According to Matthew, it is Jesus who is “the one.” Indeed, Jesus defines the realm of heaven for the disciples (the church).

Matthew 11:4-6 gives Matthew’s evidence that Jesus is the one. People who have been unable to see can now see. People who have been unable to walk can now walk. People

afflicted with leprosy are now cleansed. People who could not hear can now hear. People who live in poverty can look forward to economic regeneration.

From the perspective of end-time thinkers, conditions such as the inability to see, walk, and hear are characteristic of the broken old age. In the realm of heaven, God will release individuals and systems from these curses so that all interactions and relationships take place according to God's original purposes. Matthew interprets people regaining sight etc. as signs that God is already beginning to manifest, partially, the realm of heaven through the ministry of Jesus. After the resurrection, this ministry continues through the church.

Another purpose of Matthew 11:7-11 is to explain that John is *not* the one. The disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus may have debated one another as to which leader was "the one." Matthew seeks to settle that question while pointing to an important role for John in the apocalyptic time line.



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<http://stmarysnutleyccd.blogspot.com/2016/12/3rd-sunday-of-advent-gaudete-sunday.html>

"The third Sunday in Advent has become the rare moment when Protestant churches pay a little attention to Mary, mother of God.

The candle lit this day is traditionally pink for Mary’s day... Protestants have known who we are partly by being not-Catholic, so *not* attending to saints, to Mary, to pilgrimages and relics and the hierarchy. But Mary keeps creeping in the back door. She is the first Christian—the first one to say “yes” to God’s cockamamie scheme to save the world through an unmarried Jewish teenager from the sticks. She is present at key points in Jesus’ ministry and even at his ascension and at Pentecost. She is a friend of the poor, mother of believers, the one who taught Jesus to pray and who teaches us...”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4319 [Jason Byassee](#) Butler Chair in Homiletics and Biblical Hermeneutics, Vancouver School of Theology, Vancouver, B.C., Canada

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“Many Advent wreaths feature a pink candle for the Third Sunday of Advent -- and it’s called “the Mary candle.”

The lectionary even offers her song, the Magnificat, as an alternative to the Psalm reading for the day. Here we’ll stick with the Psalm, and ponder it as one of the many songs Mary learned when she was growing up, that she knew by heart, that she sang to her son Jesus as he was growing up. If she sang when she visited Elizabeth, or at any other time, it is because she knew the Psalms. We might try to imagine what her voice sounded like. Maybe not a big powerful soprano with vibrato, but something quieter, crystal clear, and tender...”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3107 [James Howell](#)
- Senior Pastor, Myers Park United Methodist Church, Charlotte, N.C.

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"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" If that isn't a question that breaks your heart ... or maybe, it speaks a truth, many truths, that so often we can't find the words, or the strength, or the courage, to say.

On the lips of John the Baptist, no less. The one in the know. The one who was supposed know. The one who knew Jesus...

This week, John the Baptist is in a new place. He's gone from wilderness to pent-up-ness. From freedom to confinement. From wide-open spaces to the captivity of a cell.

A change of place causes a change of perspective. No longer in the wilderness, no longer baptizing in the Jordan River, no longer having people come to him, John is now in a different desert, no longer prophesying but questioning, with people likely positioning themselves as far away from him as possible...

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” is the question of longing -- longing for what we dearly hope but then wonder if it can truly be. Longing for promises to come true when it seems that the cards are stacked against us. Longing for what was, but at the same time looking forward to what could be.

Let John’s question be your question this week -- not to answer it, not to solve it, not to tie it all up in a Christmas bow, but to lean in to the waiting, the wanting, and the wonder so as to hear God’s answer.”

- <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4767> [Karoline Lewis](#) Associate Professor of Preaching and the Marbury E. Anderson Chair in Biblical Preaching, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn