

II Christmas 2026

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Isaiah 61.1-3 St Matthew 2.19-23

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Our reading from Isaiah is one of the few times the Prayer Book appoints an Old Testament lesson to be read at Mass in place of one of Paul's letters or another New Testament reading. We're familiar with Isaiah's prophecies from the Advent liturgies.

Isaiah prophesied in Jerusalem during the latter half of the 8th Century BC, when the Southern Kingdom of Judah was being threatened by its powerful neighbor Assyria. Isaiah's prophecies were intended to warn the people their sinfulness and disobedience toward God and lack of trust in him would only lead to their destruction.

But Isaiah also preached a message of hope when he wrote...

... "The Sovereign Lord has filled me with his Spirit. He has chosen me and sent me to bring good news to the poor...He has sent me to proclaim that the time has come when the Lord will save his people."

Let's imagine for a moment we are part of the crowd in the Jerusalem of 2800 years ago. There is Divine Reversal in Isaiah's message of hope... God intervening to completely turn around impossible and negative situations into good and powerful blessings.

Here is what Isaiah says we can expect when the Lord arrives...

*...He will comfort those of us who mourn
...Joy and gladness will replace our grief
...We will sing songs of praise instead of sorrow
...We will be like trees that the Lord himself has planted
...We will do what is right
...And God will be praised for what he has done.*

What does God want from us for all the blessings he sends our way? He simply wants us to trust him completely...in times of great joy and happiness...even in times when things aren't going as well as we would like...even in times of great sorrow. Are we willing to give God our unconditional trust and love?

The Gospel reading picks up where last week's Gospel for Holy Innocents' Day left off. Like the Joseph of the Old Testament...our patron Saint Joseph received his instructions from Angels sent to him by God in a dream. He trusted God enough to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt so they could be safe from Herod's soldiers.

After Herod's death, the Romans divided his territory among his three sons. His son, Archelaus, succeeded his father as King of Judea. Archelaus was so incompetent, he was deposed by the Romans in about 6 AD and exiled to Vienne, near modern-day Lyon in France.

Joseph was given another set of instructions in a dream. He was told to return to Judea with Mary and Jesus and head north into Galilee...an area with a mixed Jewish and Gentile population. There he made his home in Nazareth. The Gospels never record anything Joseph might have said. He was a quiet man of action and carried out the Angels instructions.

The Gospel anticipates the Feast of the Epiphany, which we will celebrate this Tuesday, January 6. The arrival of wise men...Magi...from the East fulfills prophecies from Malachi and Isaiah...

...People from one end of the world honor me. Everywhere they burn incense to me and offer acceptable sacrifices

...Nations will be drawn to your light, and kings to the dawning of your new day.

Isaiah told God's people a new day was coming that would bring them out of the political and spiritual darkness threatening them. His message of hope applies as much to the present day Church and World as it did in Isaiah's time and the 2800 years since.

We are being drawn every day to the Light of Christ. The Good News...He leads us out of darkness and despair...into light and joy. All he asks of us is to trust him to lead the way!

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