

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

December 14, 2025



## SOFT

*and the comfort of the system*

by Drew Downs

Jesus turns to the crowds and speaking of John the Baptist, he asks what they expected to see — a reed shaking in the wind? He is interrogating *the people* now. This isn't about John, but their expectations of the prophet. They flocked to him. But now that he's in prison, where is their enthusiasm?

He contrasts the wildness of John with the softness of the royalty. This isn't about machismo or character, mind you. It is about

location — the safety of power and the insecurity of the wilderness. Jesus seems to be pointing to their willingness to seek the Good News in the wilderness while expecting it to look like the insulated power of empire. That it should be easy and comfortable to challenge empire. That the prophet would be treated like a politician rather than terrorist. So do we expect the same? Do we demonize the division that grows when prophets tell us the truth about our security?

# ADVENT

2025

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### Joy and Love

As we continue through this Advent season, honoring the season of anticipation and preparation for the Feast of the Incarnation on Christmas, we find ourselves following the order we've established for ourselves for this season, reminiscing of Decembers past, of gatherings and festivities and decorations. We respond to music and dance and TV specials of the past with characters from *Peanuts* or Dr. Seuss. We might decorate our homes (or not). We might feel festive (or not). This season is always full of memories and anticipation of the future.

In the Advent wreath, we've lit the candles for Hope and Peace. And the next comes the third candle, often colored pink. The Joy candle.

We call this day Gaudete Sunday. The ancient liturgy for the third Sunday of Advent began with the word *gaudete*, which means *rejoice*. This day we respond to this call to restore joy, to *re-joyce* in the world, as children of God.

Then next week, we will light the fourth candle: Love. The nature of God, the path we are to follow, the way of being the blessed community.

Our memories, preparations, fears — what are they if they are not for love? For love of God, of the kin-dom, of neighbor and self?

Perhaps we put so much pressure on this season, on our neighbors, on God(!) to make this season make us happy, hopeful, and joyous because we're afraid. Afraid to seek joy in God. In our frailty, our disappointment, our sadness. That love can be found, even now. Even here. In this space, with each other.

With love,  
Drew+

# ADVENT

2025

## FOR SUNDAY

*Advent 3A*

December 14, 2025

### Collect

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### Reading

Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.'

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

# ADVENT

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## Reflection

Last week we met John the Baptist. Now, we've skipped ahead to a future point, after King Herod arrested him and now John is rotting in prison. He now has a lot of time on his hands to question his choices. So it isn't strange to read that he's wondering if he's backed the wrong horse in Jesus. Is this the guy he thought he was? Best to send some people to find out. To double-check.

I think we can find a lot of sympathy for John the Baptist, if we try. He has a lot invested in getting this right. In getting Jesus right.

And I think Jesus gets it, too. This is what he's always dealing with: second-guesses and just-wanting-to-be-sures from his followers. And his response puts the attention back on them and tells them to report what they have observed with their own life experience: miraculous healings, cleansings, and good news brought to the poor. In other words, what John told the Pharisees and Sadducees: fruit worthy of repentance.

This fits into Jesus's consistent response when asked for certainty from people who want assurance of salvation — and what we have come to call Jesus Way of Love. And it is probably the most consistent question we all have about faith. We are promised grace and offered a path for living. It's like a handshake deal in an era of lawyers and legal contracts. We're just supposed to trust we're on the right path? Yep.

No wonder we want assurance! We're used to people breaking promises or doing what they want, rather than following the Way. We're just trying to make sense of things. Like students worries about their grade, wanting to know what they're supposed to study for the test. Clear. Confident. Secure.

And Jesus has been pretty clear about the Way. What it looks like. How to do it. Love your neighbors and work together. Pair up and heal and proclaim and do good. And the proof will reveal itself.

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