Each year on the Second Sunday of Advent we are reintroduced to John the Baptist, who startles and mystifies the people of Judea when he emerges from the desert. Wearing camel's hair and eating locusts—unusual even back then—he preaches repentance and forgiveness, then proclaims that soon the Lord will come and he will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Clearly, the world is about to change. As we prepare for the coming of the Lord at Christmas, let us ponder how different our lives and our world are because of his presence.

As we gather let us begin our service by professing what we believe.

Profession of Faith p.
I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, (*bow as we say*) ***and by the Holy Spirit he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.*** **For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

Introductory Rite:
Greeting:
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Blessed be God forever. **Blessed be God forever.**

Penitential Rite: p.
Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to participate in this sacred celebration.

I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. **Amen**

Opening Prayer:
Almighty and merciful God, may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son, but may our learning of heavenly wisdom gain us admittance to his company.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Liturgy of the Word:

First Reading p.
A reading from the Book of Isaiah *Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11*

Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the LORD double for all her sins.
A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the LORD! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Go up on to a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by his strong arm; here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Responsorial Psalm *Psalm 85: 9-14*
R/. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.
R/. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what God proclaims; the LORD—for he proclaims peace to his people.
Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land. **R/.**

Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss.
Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven. **R/.**

The LORD himself will give his benefits; our land shall yield its increase.
Justice shall walk before him, and prepare the way of his steps. **R/.**

Second Reading
A reading from the Second Letter of St. Peter *2 Peter 3: 8-14*

Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out. Since everything is to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be, conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved in flames and the elements melted by fire. But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel *Mark 1: 1-8*
A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark **Glory to you, Lord**

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.
As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."* John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed

on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Reflection on the Word:

- If we look as far as we can and squint as hard as we can, perhaps we can just make out Christ on the horizon, heading our way. We may see him coming as a newborn babe at Christmas, in glory when he comes again, or in the many other ways he appears to those of faith. We may see him in ordinary people, in well-traveled places, and at unexpected times. But we cannot see him coming if we have built mountains around us that keep us insulated from the misery of others or dug valleys that separate us from people we'd rather not live with. In proclaiming the coming of the Lord, Isaiah and John call us to make straight the paths from that distant horizon to our front door. May we heed their call and repent of our sinfulness and selfishness, giving God's forgiveness and grace, incarnated in Jesus Christ, a clear path to our heart.

- The Jordan River was not a random source of water with which John could baptize his followers. To reach the promised land, the Chosen People had to cross the Jordan. Here they emerged from their bondage in slavery and their many years of wandering in the desert to finally set foot on the land of their inheritance. By baptizing in the Jordan, John invites his followers to leave behind the captivity of sin and the isolation of the desert to a world of God's grace and mercy. He points them to Jesus, who will lead them—and now us—on a new exodus from the waters of the Jordan to the Holy Spirit, from sin to salvation, from death to new life.

- What have we done or continue to do that we're afraid might be discovered? What sin do we commit that we would rather no one find out about? The writer of the second letter of Peter, which scripture scholars believe was written well after Saint Peter's death, has a warning for us. Expanding on the idea that Jesus will return like a thief in the night, catching us in whatever state our soul is in, he writes that "the earth and everything done on it will be found out" (2 Peter 3:10). Even if we're lucky to be caught doing something good, one's whole past will be revealed at the end. What then to do? Again, return to John the Baptist. Repent of all your sins and follow the Lord steadfastly. Let forgiveness heal our past and Christ guide our future.

Question of the Week

How do I feel the effect of forgiveness, whether through the sacrament of reconciliation or directly from someone I wronged? How does it lead me to do better?

Prayer of the Faithful:

Calling to mind the needs of our brothers and sisters, we cry out in supplication, asking to see the Lord's kindness.

- For the Church, as we prepare for the coming of Christ, that we may make straight a path for him by repenting of our sins, pursuing kindness and truth, and building a world of justice and peace, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For leaders of nations including our own, that they may work cooperatively and constructively to build a world where righteousness may dwell, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For those with inadequate food, shelter, or clothing, that the rest of us may fill in our valleys of neglect and make low our mountains of self-centeredness, so that every person's basic human needs may be satisfied, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For our Jewish brothers and sisters as they celebrate Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, that they may know God's blessings all their lives, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- That we may heed John the Baptist's call this Advent, repent of our sins, and know the joy of God's forgiveness, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For what else should we pray? Let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

- For all the prayers that we hold in the silence of our hearts; for all our intentions spoken and unspoken, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

God of comfort and joy, you have promised us new heavens and a new earth where righteousness and kindness may dwell. Hear the prayers we make and guide us in the ways of justice and peace through the One whose coming we await today and every day, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Communion Rite

The Lord's Prayer: p.
Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Savior gave us.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Rite of Peace:
The sign of peace outwardly expresses a deep spiritual reality; through this sign we acknowledge Christ's presence in each other and share the peace we have received from Him. Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

Communion:
Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

The body of Christ. **Amen.**

Prayer after Communion:
Replenished by the food of spiritual nourishment, we humbly beseech you, O Lord, that, through our partaking in this mystery, you may teach us to judge wisely the things of earth and hold firm to the things of heaven.

Through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Concluding Rite:
Final Blessing:
May the Lord bless us, ✠ protect us from all evil and lead us to everlasting life. **Amen**

Go in peace! **Thanks be to God.**