



**Deacon Steve Szmuto's Reflection on the
Sunday Readings
December 8, 2019 – 2nd Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 11: 1-10 Ps 72: 1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17
Romans 15: 4-9
Matthew 3: 1-12**

Although December 8 is *the Feast of The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary – the Patronal Feast Day of the United States of America*, when the day falls on a Sunday, the Advent readings take precedence. This year, the Feast Day will be celebrated on

December 9th. Although not observed as a Holy Day of Obligation this year, it remains a Feast of great importance, and all are encouraged to take part in the Sacred Liturgy. Let us recall the words of Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist), who upon hearing Mary's greeting and filled with the Holy Spirit said, *"Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."* (Luke 1: 42b)

"A voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'" (Matthew 3: 3)

John the Baptist remains one of the most enigmatic figures of the New Testament. His appearance could be described as bizarre, perhaps even frightening. His diet, consisting of locusts and wild honey was not exactly standard fare. He did not have the polished facade of a political or religious leader; in fact, he seemed to have little respect for those who thought that they merited salvation by virtue of their ancestry in Abraham. Yet his stern message – a call to repentance in anticipation of the Kingdom of God – resonated in the hearts and minds of his disciples, who sought baptism in the waters of the Jordan River as a sign of atonement. He is the last and the greatest of the prophets.

No doubt his disciples would have proclaimed him as the messiah and made him king. However, John was not the Messiah, only the messenger and he said so to the crowds. His mission was to prepare the way for the Lord, to call others to a change of heart so that they would be prepared for the coming of the Savior. He possessed great awareness in who and what he was, and in who and what he was not. John the Baptist was the last of the great prophets, the one who would take part in the manifestation of Christ at the beginning of his ministry.

Let us strive to follow the example of John the Baptist: courageous, devoted to the Lord, and faithful to our role as humble servants. As we gather to celebrate the Eucharist during the Season of Advent, let us repent of our sins and amend our lives so that we may be made worthy to the one who came to save humanity. Let the spirit of the LORD enter our hearts as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

"The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD." (Isaiah 11: 2-3a)

Deacon Steve Szmuto