

## Wednesday Reflection

**Title:** John's Soul-Searching

**Date:** December 14, 2025

**ID:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent \* Gaudete Sunday

**Scripture:** Matthew 11:2-11.

**Text:** John the Baptist is in prison. Later in the Gospel, Matthew records his martyrdom (14:3ff). Before he dies, he sends his disciples with a pressing question: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another" (11:3). The question seems strange. John knew Jesus. (3:13). John conversed with Jesus before John baptized Jesus. Earlier, John described Jesus as "mightier" (3:11). And he predicted that Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:11). Why the question?

Perhaps John was thinking about his life as he feared its end. Perhaps he was asking whether his life was worth the sacrifice. The way he lived his life was not the way of the world. Then and now, the world offers a variety of ways to live life. Maybe he was thinking whether he should have taken another path. His life might have been less demanding and more rewarding as the world conferred rewards. If Jesus was part of God's plan, if Jesus was the Messiah, then John's own ministry was worth it. He could die in peace, knowing he cooperated with God's plan. The question was crucial.

Perhaps Jesus disappointed John. Commentators see continuity between John and Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (see Wed Reflection from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent Year A). But one can also point to discontinuity. John's disciples challenged Jesus over fasting (9:14). Jesus said he was a new type of Messiah; Jesus was new wine for fresh wineskins (9:17ff). John may have taken his sense of Messiah from Malachi. The prophet asks, "Who can endure the day of his coming?" (Malachi 3:2). Malachi compared Messianic times to refining metals with purifying fire (3:2-3). The image conformed to John's preaching we heard last week. Jesus, however, may have taken his Messianic cue from Isaiah (35: 2-10). Isaiah's proclamation echoes in Jesus's answer to John's disciples: "the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (11:5). Jesus's inclusive compassion was the hallmark of his Messiahship (9:35-38). In addition, Jesus's teaching had gone in another direction from John's. Read the Beatitudes (5:1-12), or Jesus's teaching on anger (5:21-26) and hatred (5:43-48), and against judgment (7:1-5). John's hellfire-and-brimstone is of another vision.

The discontinuity explains the next section (11:7-11). Jesus speaks with admiration of John. Like Jesus, John discouraged a regal Messiah. A reed was a symbol of King Herod Antipas; he used the symbol on coins (11:7). Fine clothing and palaces were signs of a royal court (11:8). John and Jesus's disciples were not attracted to worldly power. And power over others was far from the hearts and minds of John and Jesus. Even so, the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed differed from John's. Jesus preached a revolution of the heart, a Kingdom of compassion, charity, peace, acceptance, forgiveness, self-giving love. The least born into the Lord's kingdom of love is greater even than the Baptist.