

**Third Sunday of Advent – Cycle B**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – December 17, 2017**  
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Power outages are something with which most Memphians are familiar. Every time there is a thunderstorm or the wind picks up a little, we know that we have to reach for the flashlight just in case. Of course, flashlights are funny things. You can use one for days at a time it seems and the light never flickers, but just turn it off and set it on your night stand until you need it, and – well, the batteries are dead. I don't care if they are only two days old, there is something about a power outage that causes perfectly good batteries to lose their strength – just when you need them the most. And so most of us have our share of more traditional backups – the ever faithful candle, for example. I usually have plenty of candles scattered throughout my residence. Of course, as someone who doesn't smoke, I'm hard pressed to find a match most of the time, but when I do, the candle provides a little light. And I have learned that old trick that our ancestors knew in the days before electricity – put the candle next to a mirror and the light seems to double. Not only do you have the light from the candle itself, you also have the reflected light. Add another candle, or another mirror and the light expands even further. No wonder ancient palaces like Versailles had halls of mirrors. In those times before electricity, rooms filled with mirrors must have been the brightest in the house.

In our gospel today, we encounter John the Baptist once again. Last week, we heard St. Mark's account of John's ministry. Today, our text is from the Gospel according to St. John the Apostle and Evangelist. The synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – are more concerned with placing the ministry of Jesus within an organized, historical record. John's gospel, on the other hand, is more theological. He is less concerned with when Jesus said something as he is with the content of the teaching. So the first two verses of our passage today are actually taken from the great prologue to the gospel. The Prologue of John's gospel is so important to our faith that in the days before the Second Vatican Council, it was proclaimed at the conclusion of every Mass – the Last Gospel, it was called. *In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum.* “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” Jesus, the Light that shines in the darkness, was coming into the world and John the Baptist had come to testify

to the light, to testify to Jesus, the Christ. Jesus was that candle, flickering, but never overcome by the darkness. John was not the candle; John was the mirror, the one who reflected and magnified the light of Christ.

The images of a candle and a mirror help us to understand the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist – but those same images should help us to understand our own relationship with Christ, our own role in salvation history. Unlike John, we do not come before the Lord in time. Our role is not to announce his arrival. Our role is to announce his presence, to reflect his glory, his light to a world still trapped in darkness and sin. We like to think that the work of a disciple is done – that the Light of Christ now shines in the four corners of the world – but there are plenty of places that are still in darkness – places in our world, in our city, in our neighborhood, in our family, in our own heart. There are plenty of dark corners that are not yet open to the light of Christ. It is not that the Light of Christ is not bright enough, not powerful enough. The Light of Christ has the power, as the prophet Isaiah says in our first reading, to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners. But just as the light of a candle does not shine into the next room, so the gentle light of Christ does not force its way into our lives or break down the walls of our hearts. In order for the light of Christ to reach those dark places in our lives, we need mirrors – we need those like John and the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints of our tradition – we need those whose lives reflect Christ, those who give witness to the healing power of the Lord. And more than that, **we need** to be those witnesses, we need to reflect the light of Christ, we need to be mirrors ourselves.

That's where it gets difficult. You see, it is difficult to be a mirror when we are trying too hard to be our own light. We don't want to point to someone else, even to Christ, when we're trying to get all of the attention for ourselves. In business, in our social life, in our relationships, we're trying to shine. We see ourselves as the Sun that all of the planets revolve around – when in reality, we're just a little flashlight. We burn brightly for a while, but our light quickly fades, our batteries wear out. Like John the Baptist, like Mary, we are called to be a mirror – not to shine with our own light, but to reflect the light of Christ. But to accept our role as a mirror means that we have to give up trying to be our own light. We have to stop trying to be the center of attention and allow Christ to be the center of our life. We have to stop pointing to ourselves and begin pointing toward Christ. That's not easy for those of us who live in the modern world, for those of us accustomed to promoting ourselves in a sometimes difficult economy. But our spiritual life is different from our economic status. Here we must recognize our dependence upon God. Here we must confess that we are not the center of the universe, that we are not the Sun. Here we must humbly bow before the Son of God and allow **him** to shine **through us**.