

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT - B

In today's Gospel John the Baptist is asked to explain himself to the authorities.

So I thought I would explain a few things new in church for Advent.

The first thing is not really new; it's the **color rose**.

We light the rose candle and the priest wears a rose vestment ("rose" not pink) to mark **Gaudete Sunday**.

As I have explained in the past, "Gaudete" means "rejoice!"

We rejoice this Sunday because the celebration of our Lord's birthday is near.

We rejoice because God is faithful and is fulfilling the promises made both through the prophets and in Jesus Christ.

We rejoice because Jesus is coming to us every moment of every day proclaiming glad tidings to the poor, and healing for the brokenhearted.

Rose is also the color of the dawn.

Look at the sky early on a clear morning ... the shades of rose and blue are spectacular.

In the ancient "O Antiphons" Jesus is called the "Dayspring from on high" and the "Radiant Dawn."

The second thing I would like to talk about are the "**O Antiphons.**"

These are the seven ancient titles of the Messiah ... We are all familiar with them in the Advent hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

They are also used in the Liturgy of the Hours and at Mass on the last seven days before Christmas.

And, they are the basis of our Advent Prayers of the Faithful ... It is because they are addressed to Christ that the lector invites our response by saying "We pray to you Lord."

My third explanation is in regard to our **new Advent banners.**

If you look at them carefully you can see the image of a blossoming vine, or branch, or stem.

One of the O Antiphons taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah is "O Flower of Jesse's Stem."

Isaiah writes of "a shoot that will sprout from the stump of Jesse."

You are probably familiar from your days in religious education with the concept of the "Jesse Tree" which represents the family tree of Jesus.

Jesse was the father of King David, and the promised Messiah was to be a descendant of David.

Thus, Jesus is called the "Flower of Jesse's Stem."

Fourth and finally, I would like to say a few words about our **new Book of the Gospels** which we will use for Advent and during Lent.

I wanted a wooden Book cover to set it apart from the silver cover we use during Ordinary Time and the gold cover we use for the Christmas and Easter seasons, and for major feast days.

I think that there is also a beautiful symbolism in the use of wood:

Jesus was laid in the wood of the manger and he was nailed to the wood of the cross.

As we prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth, our journey through Advent contains so many beautiful images, rituals, and hymns.

I hope that together they create an inspiring experience of longing and hope as we wait in joyful expectation of Christmas.