

Fr Ben's Weekly Reflection

1st Sunday of Advent

Nov 29, 2026

What Not To Do

Advent means the beginning of a new liturgical Church year…so Happy New Year! This year we focus on the Gospel of Mark in the majority of our Sunday Gospels. New Years on January 1st is when we make resolutions that last a few weeks. Since this is a Church new year, I think a good resolution to make for this year is to be disciples of Jesus Christ. But what does that look like? Let's look at some examples during Advent.

The first example of being a disciple we can think about in Advent is actually a bad first example. Sometimes we learn best from what **not** to do. The person I'm thinking about is Zachariah.

Zachariah was an older Jewish priest serving in Jerusalem. Being older and priest, we know he knew his scriptures inside and out. He is a "cradle-Jew" so to speak; born and raised. He knew and did his duty well. By all accounts, he's a perfect model of discipleship. He checked all the right boxes. Why is he a bad example?

The angel Gabriel shows up and announces to Zachariah he is going to be a father of John the Baptist who would go before and announce the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth are childless. This is the answer to their prayers, right! Zachariah basically calls Gabriel crazy and says "nope. Can't happen. We are too old."

He should know better since he knows his scriptures. People too old or barren have had kids announced and promised by God numerous times in scripture. Um, hello, Abraham…one of the founding patriarchs of Judaism? Had his promised child at nearly 100 years old?

Zachariah is a bad example because he doubted. Despite being a model Jewish priest, something was off inside him, causing him to doubt God and question whether he, Zechariah, had a special calling from God. So he is struck mute until John is born. But his story has a happy ending and gives us a model of discipleship. He announces (by writing) that the baby is to be named John and he is able to speak and praises God.

Each of us is called to be a disciple. Some of us may be "cradle-Christian Catholics" but may feel like Zachariah. We check all our boxes and can't dream bigger. Or maybe we think God won't really answer our prayers. Being a disciple means knowing "I am called. I have a mission. God is not done with me."

If you haven't yet, please do the Discipleship Maker Index survey with this in mind. Or take it with the mindset of wanting to explore that dream again. Take time this Advent season to not rush to Christmas but ask that fundamental question: "what is God asking of me?" .