

Advent 3 Year C

12/12/2021

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Canticle 9; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

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Today is Gaudete Sunday...

The third Sunday of Advent...

Named for the Latin word *rejoice*...

Today is the midway point of Advent.

So, it is a time of rejoicing because Jesus is almost here.

The Savior has almost come... he is so close.

Today we light the pink or rose candle.

Similar in Lent...

the tradition is that the Pope gave a citizen a pink rose on this day.

Following this papal rose custom, bishops and priests began wearing rose-colored vestments...

And as a result, the pink candle gained a place in the Advent wreath.

Of course, the Advent wreath was first developed in Germany in the 16th century...

but did not really gain prominence until the late 19th century.

It did not start in practice in the United States until the 1920's.

It was then that the wreath had 20 red candles and 4 white candles...
Eventually being shortened to what we have today...
three purple candles...
a pink candle...
and the white candle in the middle for Christmas.

So today we have a pink candle...
On this third Sunday of Advent...
Representing the Advent theme of joy.

And now you know why we have a pink candle on this third Sunday in
Advent.

So, on this 3rd Sunday of Advent...
the time is for rejoicing...
Although culture tells us it's already Christmas season,
the Church reminds us through the pink candle of Advent that there is an
appointed time for everything...

The 3rd chapter of Ecclesiastes says:

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under
heaven*

The time now is for rejoicing...
because the Lord is coming soon!

Advent expresses waiting, watching, preparing...

But also, joy...

Because our savior is almost here.

There is excitement in our waiting and preparing.

Our second reading from Philippians points this out clearly:

we read:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near.

Joy is the theme of this third Sunday of Advent.

And it is clearly an emotion and motivating feeling that we all need...

Especially during times of darkness, difficulty, and uncertainty.

Joy is what holds us in tough times.

In fact, often when someone resigns from their occupation they lament:

The joy is gone.

That is because...

Joy is a motivator of good works.

It gives us strength during difficult times.

As the Old Testament leader Nehemiah declared:

...the joy of the Lord is your strength.

(Nehemiah 8.10)

It is not in worldly happiness that we find great strength...

But we find strength when we are filled with the joy of our Lord Jesus.

Our readings show us two ways to receive joy in the midst of the darkness of Advent...

How to receive joy in our long waiting and our watching.

First, **Hope produces joy.**

Our first reading today is from the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah.

He was a prophet during the 7th century BC.

In three short chapters, Zephaniah pronounced God's judgment on the corruption and wickedness of his day in Judah and the nations around them.

Zephaniah contains some of the harshest judgment in the Old Testament.

As one commentator puts it:

Zephaniah did not live in "the best of times; the worst of times."

*Zephaniah simply lived in the worst of times.*¹

¹ Kenneth Barker, Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, TNAC Volume 20 (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 405.

Corrupt leader after corrupt leader...

Judgment was on the horizon...

And in the midst of all this talk about judgment and destruction...

Our reading comes from the last 7 verses of the minor prophet.

Zephaniah 3:14-20 is very different than all that comes before it.

It starts with a command to rejoice.

Sing, Daughter Zion;

shout aloud, Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,

Daughter Jerusalem!

The prophet declares that despite everything...

God will always rescue his people.

There is hope in the redemption of God.

And in that hope, there is great joy.

The prophet's words are very tender:

The Lord your God is with you,

the Mighty Warrior who saves.

He will take great delight in you;

in his love he will no longer rebuke you,

but will rejoice over you with singing.

God does not just tolerate us...

As if he has great lightning bolts ready to thrash us if his mercy runs thin

He rejoices over his children...

He sings over them.

Susanah Wilson Hanson writes concerning this verse:

The picture that comes to mind is of a mother who is singing to her newborn baby or toddler. The child is rejoicing to see his parent, and the parent is rejoicing with great joy over her child. The child kicks his legs and lets out a squeal of joy. The mother scoops her child up in her arms. She sings over him and quiets him with her love, perhaps while rocking back and forth and brushing the hair off of his forehead.

*That is the picture we get of God in this very moment, rejoicing over his children.*²

We are still in the penitential season of Advent...

We are still living in a fallen world...

It may seem as though much is going wrong...

But we can rest in the hope of the coming of our Lord...

*...we his children will see the day when God rejoices over us and quiets us with his love.*³

² Susanah J. Wilson Hanson, 2021 Advent Devotional, Trinity School for Ministry (Ambridge: Whitchurch Publishing, 2021), 21.

³ Ibid., 21.

It is this hope in our Lord that produces joy in the midst of our waiting and watching.

The second way to receive joy in the midst of the darkness of Advent is by **the Holy Spirit filling us with joy.**

In our Gospel reading today, John the Baptist prophesies about the coming of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

He said to the crowd around him:

I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The work of Jesus... the cross and the resurrection...

is a call for repentance...

a baptism of fire.

Fire is representative of cleansing...

It is used to purify.

As St. Peter writes:

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

(1 Peter 1:6-7)

The themes of Advent are present in that holy scripture...

Joy in our waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Trials and suffering are part of waiting...

But in them we can find joy as we near the coming of our Lord...

It is in the fires of this life that we are refined...

We are made pure.

But John the Baptist also talks about a baptism in the Holy Spirit.

When we become children of God...

We receive the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life...

It is at our water baptism that *we are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.*

And we continue to walk in that baptism...

Asking the Holy Spirit to continue to fill us with his presence...

And there may be many signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit with us...

The Bible may call these signs and wonders...

Healings, prophecies, tongues...

But also, in the ways that we live...

One of the fruit of having the Spirit of God in your life is joy.

(Galatians 5:22)

The Holy Spirit brings joy into our lives...

St. Paul writes in the book of Romans:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Romans 15:13)

The Holy Spirit brings joy.

Therefore, may we pray all the more for the Holy Spirit to come...

To fill us up with his presence...

Filling us with the joy of the Lord.

Despite the craziness of our world...

The darkness of the days we live in...

The trials that are before us and before the people of God...

We find joy in the midst of the darkness of waiting and watching

because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

So, on this Gaudete Sunday...

This third Sunday of Advent.

Where the theme of our readings is joy.

Even in the midst of struggle...

We find joy in our hope.

We are filled with joy because of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

And I think the best summary of all of this is found in our...

Preface for Advent...

At communion each Sunday in Advent these powerful words are said:

*Because you sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death,
and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life; that when he shall come
again in power and great triumph to judge the world,
we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.*

Jesus is coming back to judge the world...

But we as children of God without shame...

Without fear...

We rejoice...

Jesus is near.

Amen.