

Third Sunday of Advent – C  
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Holy Family Catholic Church  
Kirkland, Washington  
16 December 2018

Zephaniah 3:14-18a  
Isaiah 12  
Philippians 4:4-7  
(Isaiah 61:1) Luke 3:10-18

### *What Should We Do?*

The Second and Third Sundays of Advent each year reintroduce us to John the Baptist and his urgent message for all people: “Prepare the way of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> He delivered his message with *zeal*, and also with a bit of *harshness*. His *zeal* propelled him to preach to as many people as he could, “through the whole region of the Jordan.”<sup>2</sup> And his *harshness* showed itself, such as when he called the crowd a “brood of vipers!”<sup>3</sup>

John’s message wasn’t meant for only holy religious people. His message was for *all* people *everywhere*.<sup>4</sup> And his combination of *zeal* and *harshness* got the attention of all kinds of people. Not just the crowds who felt comfortable and welcome in a religious setting. But also, those who wouldn’t normally be found or welcomed in a religious setting, such as tax collectors and soldiers – those who were considered religious outcasts and even enemies of God’s people.<sup>5</sup>

His message was urgent, zealous, and harsh – but it was also *attractive* and filled people with expectation. What was it that attracted so many different kinds of people and “filled [them] with expectation”?<sup>6</sup> What was it that made both religious and non-religious folks pay attention to him, follow him, repent, and be baptized by him? What was it that made people take the “next step”<sup>7</sup> of not just listening to him, but also asking him:

*Now that we believe you...now that we are preparing the way of the Lord...tell us, John: “What should we do?”<sup>8</sup> What do we do next?*

The reason that folks were attracted to John the Baptist’s message is contained in the last verse of today’s Gospel. It’s because – amidst the urgency, zeal, and harshness – ultimately,

John “preached good news to the people.”<sup>9</sup> Good News to *all* people: No matter if one was a member of the “in” crowd, or an outcast on the margins, John preached the Good News:

That the Lord was coming – *very soon* – to save *all* people!<sup>10</sup>

This, my friends, truly is “good news of great joy” for *all* people in *every* place and in *every* time!<sup>11</sup>

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And every year on this day, Third Sunday of Advent, we celebrate this Good News with a special Joy, because Jesus Christ is coming *very soon!* Christmas is *so close* that we are already beginning to feel its Joy! That is why we call this particular day *Gaudete Sunday*. *Gaudete* is the Latin word for *Rejoice!* or *Be joyful!* This is the day for all of us to *rejoice* and to *be joyful* that we are *so close* to welcoming Jesus Christ into our world! The One whom *all of us* have been waiting for. Not just the people of Israel 2,000 years ago. *All* people in *every* place and in *every* time.

The readings for today’s Gaudete Sunday offer us three aspects to consider about the spiritual gift of Joy:

- 1) *Our Faith that brings us Joy:*<sup>12</sup> That we hear about and believe the ways that God has always brought His people out of hard situations and into His Joy.
- 2) *Our Hope that brings us Joy:*<sup>13</sup> No matter what our situation is, we have Hope in God’s Promise to bring *us* out of *our* difficulties, and into His *everlasting* Joy.
- 3) *Our Love that brings us Joy:*<sup>14</sup> Like Love, Joy is not something that we only receive. Joy is something that only comes to us when we offer it to and share it with others.

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The First Reading speaks to us about our Faith that brings us Joy. The Prophet Zephaniah wrote to the people of Judah and Jerusalem about six centuries before Christ. His

short message is known its strong emphasis on the devastation that the Lord's judgment will bring to the people for their sins against God and neighbor.

Yet, at the very end of his message, the Prophet's tone shifts to one of great Joy! And that is the message we receive today. That, even when the situation looked bad for God's people (oftentimes brought about by their own sins and lack of faith), God always remained faithful. God always had a plan to rescue His people from these bad situations. When we hear in the Scriptures that God has always rescued His people, it increases our Faith in God's plan to always move toward bringing Joy to His people.

In order to experience more Joy, ask God to increase your Faith!

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The Second Reading speaks to us about our Hope that brings us Joy. Paul wrote his Letter to the Philippians from prison. Even while suffering in prison, Paul experienced great Joy! Paul is an example of Hope for us. That, no matter what suffering or difficult situations we are going through, we have Hope that God will fulfill His Promise and bring us to eternal Joy. And the more Hope we have about that Promise of future Joy, the more we begin to experience that Joy even now!<sup>15</sup> Even in difficult circumstances.

In order to experience more Joy, ask God to increase your Hope!

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Finally, in the Gospel, John the Baptist speaks to us about our Love that brings us Joy. The crowds, the tax collectors, and the soldiers ask John the question: "What do we do?" On this Gaudete Sunday, we could add on to the question, and make it: "What do we do *to be joyful?*" And John provides an answer for us. That is, by giving to others; by taking care of

others; by showing respect and Love for others<sup>16</sup> – that’s what we need to do in order to be joyful.

Having Joy comes from doing things that bring Love and Joy to others. That is the way of the Trinity: the Love and Joy that is shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, along with all the angels and saints in Heaven. Joy cannot be a one-way street. We don’t receive Joy by receiving it. Joy only comes when we give it to others. From emptying oneself. That is the way of the Trinity. That’s what the Son – the Second Person of the Trinity – did by emptying Himself and coming into our world as a Baby. It was through coming as man that God showed us what Love and Joy in the Trinity look like.

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This Gaudete Sunday, as we draw *so close* to Christmas, stress might be running higher as we get ourselves ready to celebrate. There really is no better way to get ready than to remember the most important thing: *to make sure that we’re bringing Joy to others*. Of all the important things to do this week, nothing could be more important. We only have so much time to get things done in the next week. Maybe not everything we want to get done will get done. That can be frustrating; that can be stressful; that can maybe even be disappointing.

But all that frustration, stress, and disappointment can be wiped away if we remember the most important thing this week: *To Rejoice! To Be Joyful!* To bring Joy to the world! Using our thoughts, words, actions, and prayers to bring Joy to the world. That is the Good News! That, my friends, is the only needful thing this week.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 3:4 (from the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Advent)

<sup>2</sup> Luke 3:3

<sup>3</sup> Luke 3:7 (from a verse found between the Gospels for the Second and the Third Sundays of Advent)

<sup>4</sup> See Luke 3:6: “...all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

<sup>5</sup> Luke 3:12, 14

<sup>6</sup> Luke 3:15

<sup>7</sup> From the Holy Family Parish Prayer: “Heavenly Father, please send your Holy Spirit upon our parish community, to help each of us take our next step in following Jesus...”

<sup>8</sup> Luke 3:10

<sup>9</sup> Luke 3:18

<sup>10</sup> See Matthew 1:20-21: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. ... She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>11</sup> See Luke 2:10: “The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’”

<sup>12</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* Glossary: FAITH: Both a gift of God and a human act by which the believer gives personal adherence to God who invites his response, and freely assents to the whole truth that God has revealed.

<sup>13</sup> *CCC* Glossary: HOPE: The theological virtue by which we desire and expect from God both eternal life and the grace we need to attain it.

<sup>14</sup> *CCC* Glossary: CHARITY: The theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.

<sup>15</sup> Faith and Hope help us begin to experience the Joy of eternal life here on Earth. See *CCC* 163: “Faith makes us taste in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below. Then we shall see God ‘face to face’, ‘as he is’. So faith is already the beginning of eternal life...”

<sup>16</sup> See Luke 3:11, 13-14