

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #9

READING I Zephaniah 3:14–18a

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!
Sing joyfully, O Israel!
Be glad and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has removed the judgment against you,
he has turned away your enemies;
the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune to fear.
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a mighty savior;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
and renew you in his love,
he will sing joyfully because of you,
as one sings at festivals.

Zephaniah = zef-uh-Nī-uh

On this Gaudete (“rejoice”) Sunday, be sure to communicate the joy of the prophet’s words.

Slow your pace for “removed the judgment against you” and “turned away your enemies” to highlight the sobriety of these events.

Attend to this phrase—the presence of God in *our* midst is our cause for joy, too.

The image of God singing is a profound one. Pause at the end of the preceding phrase after the word “love,” and allow a little amazement to come into your words to the end.

READING I Today the Church celebrates Gaudete (Latin for “rejoice”) Sunday. The readings remind us to rejoice in all circumstances over what God has done and what he will accomplish.

Written during the reign of Judah’s king, Josiah (640–609 BC), a mere fifty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, the message of the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah was primarily one of condemnation over the moral decline of Judah and its rulers (the Davidic kings). Warning of the ominous “day of the Lord,” the prophet foretold it as a day of destruc-

tion, not only of Judah, Jerusalem, and the foreign nations, but also of creation.

However, the book concludes with a dramatic reversal of the dark mood, shifting from the angst of the earlier condemnations to rejoicing in an ode to joy (Zephaniah 3:14–20). It is from this ode that today’s reading is drawn. Offering comfort to Jerusalem (“daughter Zion”) and the remnant of the nation of Israel that will be gathered, the ode declares that “The LORD has removed judgment against you, he has turned away your enemies.” But there is more! Pointing to a hope-filled day (juxta-

posed to the ominous “day of the Lord”), frightened Israel is called to joy, gladness, and exaltation because the Lord, who is Israel’s king and saving warrior, mighty and victorious, is in their midst. On *that* day, the Lord will rejoice over Zion!

READING II Although Paul preferred to visit personally with the communities he established, he was often forced to rely on a letter. Having founded the Christian community in Philippi around AD 49, the letter that Paul sent to the community

For meditation and context:

Philippians = fih-LIP-ee-uhnz

Pronounce the word "rejoice" with confidence and clarity the first time and pause briefly before the second instance. Read the second instance more emphatically. A smile is good!

Since worry and anxiety are part of the human condition, bring your focus here to prayer and thanksgiving, which lead to peace.

several years later is filled with rejoicing, affection, and encouragement.

Toward the end of the letter, Paul briefly deals with three miscellaneous topics. He offers advice to some community members (4:2–3), he provides thoughts on prayer (4:4–7), and he inserts an exhortation on virtue (4:8–9). Today's reading is the section on prayer.

Drawing on the joy that permeates the letter, Paul repeatedly calls the community to rejoice. The primary reason for their rejoicing is that "the Lord is near." In encouraging them to "rejoice in the Lord always,"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Isaiah 12:2–3, 4, 5–6 (6)

R. Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

God indeed is my savior;
I am confident and unafraid.

My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.

With joy you will draw water
at the fountain of salvation.

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;
among the nations make known his deeds,
proclaim how exalted is his name.

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious
achievement;

let this be known throughout all
the earth.

Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,
for great in your midst
is the Holy One of Israel!

READING II Philippians 4:4–7

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians

Brothers and sisters:

Rejoice in the Lord always.I shall say it again: **rejoice!**Your **kindness** should be known to **all**.**The Lord is near.**

Have no anxiety at all, but in **everything**,
by **prayer** and petition, with **thanksgiving**,
make your requests **known** to **God**.

Then the **peace** of **God** that surpasses all understanding
will guard your **hearts** and **minds** in **Christ Jesus**.

he implies that rejoicing is appropriate, no matter the circumstance. Clearly, rejoicing is Paul's preferred attitudinal disposition. At the same time, Paul is aware that anxiety can diminish joy. Consequently, he recommends three prayer forms as antidotes: prayer (for oneself), petition (for others), and thanksgiving (directed toward God). Of the three, thanksgiving makes the other two possible. It is the most powerful because its fruit, the "peace of God," aligns the mind and heart with Christ and grants the person praying protection from surrounding events and pressures. "Rejoice in

the Lord always" summarizes the letter and this particular passage marvelously well.

GOSPEL

Having already asserted that John's significance exceeds that of political and religious leaders of his age and that his message is in line with that of Israel's prophets (see the Gospel reading and commentary for the Second Sunday of Advent), Luke now recalls in today's Gospel the beginnings of John's public ministry. While Luke shares the same overall story as Mark and Matthew, he offers unique features as well. For

Notice the change of emphasis (see the bolded text) in John's responses. Each repetition of the question "What should we do?" gives John the chance to make his point to different groups in different ways, all under the same umbrella of justice. Deliver John's responses firmly. Note that all of his answers focus on honorable distribution of goods.

extortion = ehk-STOHR-shuhn

Emphasize the contrast between John and Jesus by stressing the words "I" and "He," concluding with the parallel that both men bring "good news."

winnowing = WIN-oh-wihng

exhorting = egh-ZOHR-ting

example, while all three Gospels recall that John preaches repentance and baptizes, Luke alone describes the questions of those seeking to repent. John's answers echo Jesus' later preaching regarding the proper disposition toward possessions (share with whomever is in need and be satisfied with your pay) and the need to abandon all unjust forms of acting ("stop collecting more than what is prescribed" and "do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone").

John's message and activity lead many to wonder if John might be the Christ, a tra-

GOSPEL Luke 3:10-18

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

The crowds **asked** John the Baptist,

"What should we **do**?"

He said to them in reply,

"**Whoever** has **two** cloaks

should **share** with the **person** who has **none**.

And whoever has **food** should do **likewise**."

Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him,

"**Teacher**, what should we **do**?"

He answered them,

"**Stop collecting more** than what is prescribed."

Soldiers also asked him,

"And what is it that we **should do**?"

He told them,

"Do **not** practice **extortion**,
do **not** **falsely accuse** anyone,
and **be satisfied** with your wages."

Now the people were filled with **expectation**,
and **all** were asking in their hearts
whether **John** might be **the Christ**.

John answered them all, saying,

"I am **baptizing** you with **water**,
but one **mightier** than I is **coming**.

I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.

He will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit** and **fire**.

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

Exhorting them in many other ways,

he preached **good news** to the people.

dition preserved only in Luke and John. While last week's Gospel quoted Isaiah the prophet to clarify that John was the forerunner, John himself makes the distinction in today's Gospel, stating, "one mightier than I is coming" who will baptize with "the Holy Spirit and fire." Writing from his post-resurrection perspective, Luke may well have had Pentecost in mind. In spite of some ominous language ("the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire"), John's preaching leads to eager anticipation (the "good news") for what God is about to do. S.L.