



Third Sunday of Advent

December 12, 2021

Introduction

Christ's presence in our midst is cause for singing. The nearness of the God in prayer, in every circumstance, is cause for rejoicing. The coming of one "more powerful" than John, even with a winnowing fork in hand, is good news—and cause for exultation—for us who are being saved. Great joy is the tone for the third Sunday of Advent.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, Father, ✚ Son, and Holy Spirit, who alone does wonders, who lifts up the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin, trusting in the tender mercy of our God.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God for whom we wait,
in the presence of one another, we confess our sin before you.
We fail in believing that your good news is for us.
We falter in our call to tend your creation.
We find our sense of self in material wealth.
We fear those different from ourselves.
We forget that we are your children and turn away from your love.
Forgive us, Blessed One, and assure us again of your saving grace. Amen.

God, in Christ Jesus, has looked with favor upon you!
Through the power of the Holy Spirit, ✚ your sins are forgiven.
You are children of the Most High,
inheritors of the eternal promise, and recipients of divine mercy.
God strengthens you anew to follow the way of peace. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn ELW # 257 (vs 5-6)/ LBW # 34 (vs 1 & 4)

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the preaching of John, that, rejoicing in your salvation, we may bring forth the fruits of repentance; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20

The prophet Zephaniah's message is mostly one of judgment for sin. This reading, however, which comes from the conclusion of the book, prophesies joy for Judah and Jerusalem. Judgment has led to repentance, and God's salvation is at hand.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-6

²Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might,
and has become my salvation.

³**With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.**

⁴And you will say in that day:

Give thanks to the LORD, call on God's name;
make known the deeds of the LORD among the nations;
proclaim that this name is exalted.

⁵**Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.**

⁶Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Despite being in prison, Paul is remarkably upbeat as he writes this letter. Here, he urges his friends in Philippi to trust God with all their worries and concerns with the hope that they will experience God's joy and peace.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: Luke 3:7-18

John the Baptist heralds the mighty one who is coming. John teaches that preparation for God's reign is not a matter of identity but of bearing fruits of merciful justice, radical generosity, and vocational integrity.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Good morning! I am Bishop Bob Humphrey. I bring you greetings from 34,000 siblings in Christ in the VA Synod. Our denomination says, “We are church together!” None of us is church on our own. We really do need one another. Region 9 lives this truth out more and more every year – for which I am both grateful and hopeful for our future together.

Let us pray... *Lord, grant that your word is proclaimed in truth and received with joy!*
Amen.

This is both a wonderful and hard time of year. Do you know what I mean?

You know... all the ways Hallmark cards, movies and many Christmas songs portray how it’s “A Wonderful Life” for those who are fortunate and surrounded by people who love and support them. And, this *can* be a time for wonderful reunions, delighted faces and delicious food. I hope it is for you and those you love. I know I’m looking forward to the festivities and seeing family!

But..., this time of year can also be a time when relationships are strained, budgets busted and the deep, difficult experience of loss and grief can be almost suffocating. The combination of COVID racial injustice and hateful speech as done so much harm to so many, including our beloved church. That is part of why I am so grateful for strong communities and people of faith who make a point of remembering and reaching out to those who are suffering, oppressed and lonely.

Because, this paradoxical tension exists not only for us individually, but also as a church and society. We are both blessed by God and, we are also called by God to care for those who cannot, for a multitude of reasons, care for themselves or are victims of others and unjust systems!

So... On a Sunday like this, in a season like this, in a time like this – it is so helpful to come to worship and allow the people of God to surround us; the Word of God to both comfort and challenge us; and the Holy Meal of God to feed us... so we *can* go in peace... to serve others!

In many communities December 12th is also the commemoration or feast day for Our Lady of Guadalupe, in honor of the woman dressed in traditional Aztec clothing who appeared to an indigenous man in Mexico in 1531. This event has been embraced as Mary, the Mother of Jesus, speaking and appearing in ways that honor and lift up indigenous people everywhere.

As we hear at the Gospel from Luke 3, Dr. David Lose offers a very helpful commentary: “In these verses, John gives concrete ethical instruction to those gathered, and the content of that instruction is rather surprising. After announcing impending eschatological judgment with some vim and vigor, John's counsel seems fairly ordinary, even mundane. To the (presumably poor) crowds: "Share." (vs 10). To the tax collectors, "Be fair." (vs 13) To soldiers, "Don't bully." (vs 14).

Pastor Lose continues, “This feels more like the stuff of Kindergarten than Apocalypse. Which may be Luke's point. Fidelity does not have to be heroic. There are opportunities to do God's will, to be God's people, all around us. These opportunities are shaped by our context: the roles in which we find ourselves and the needs of the neighbor with which we are confronted.” ---Dr. David Lose, (WorkingPreacher.org @2009)

Zephaniah said it well, “*Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgements against you... the Lord is in your midst (3:14b,15b)* From Isaiah we sang, *Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and will not be afraid... (12:2a)*

The amazing Grace and Good News Jesus brings into the world is simple. God loves us! God knows us – and still forgives and frees us... every day through our baptism and in worship. Our eternal salvation is secured, not through our effort or merit, but through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You don't have to struggle or worry or work anymore! It's all done.

St. Paul proposed, *Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything... (Philippians 4:5-6a)* So, here is the classic Lutheran question: “What are we going to do – now that we don't *have to* worry or do anything... to earn God's favor?”

I don't know... how about we start by embracing the amazing Good News that God comes to us in ways that affirm us for being exactly who we are...beloved children of God!

Then, let's go in genuine peace... to serve the Lord every day in every way. A great place to start, especially these days, is with Pastor Lose's simple formula based on our Gospel reading today: “Share + Be Fair + Don't Bully!”

In this most holy season, amidst the flurry of feelings and the tensions that surround and fill us, May the Creator of all time and space fill you with a true sense of wonder, awe and holy peace...

“Comfort, Comfort Now My People” In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen!

Hymn of the Day ELW # 249/LBW # 36 *On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Nicene Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary
and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

**He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.

A brief silence.

Holy God, renew your church and raise up leaders who announce your good news. Grant peace to congregations and seminarians in the midst of transition. Guide the work of candidacy and call committees. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, your Spirit brought forth the earth and all that is in it. Breathe life into us, that we are inspired to live in harmony with one another and the planet.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Shepherding God, you lead your people in paths of righteousness. Raise up prophets in our own day who warn against captivity to greed and point us to the freedom found in generosity. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Nurturing God, you come near in times of worry and need. Cradle us in your arms, that we trust you and are not afraid. Attend to any who are hungry, imprisoned, or ill this day, especially those we name now. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Rejoicing God, you exult over us in singing. Enliven the song of this assembly and bless the ministry of church musicians. With instruments and dance, join our voices to the song of all creation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give you thanks for your servants who showed us your goodness and grace. By the power of your Spirit, keep us steadfast in faith until we make our home with you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 244/LBW # 25

Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Bishop Robert F. Humphrey, Bishop of the Virginia Synod.