

Weekend Readings & Reflections

December 11-12, 2021 – Third Sunday of Advent

Reflection: *The people in today's Gospel are "filled with expectation." They believe John the Baptist might be the messiah they've been waiting for. Three times we hear their question: "What then should we do?" The messiah's coming requires every man and woman to choose—to "repent" or not. That's John's message and it will be Jesus' too (see [Luke 3:3](#); [5:32](#); [24:47](#)). "Repentance" translates a Greek word, *metanoia* (literally, "change of mind"). In the Scriptures, repentance is presented as a twofold "turning"—away from sin (see [Ezekiel 3:19](#); [18:30](#)) and toward God (see [Sirach 17:20–21](#); [Hosea 6:1](#)). This "turning" is more than attitude adjustment. It means a radical life change. It requires "good fruits as evidence of your repentance" (see [Luke 3:8](#)). That's why John tells the crowds, soldiers, and tax collectors they must prove their faith through works of charity, honesty, and social justice. In today's Liturgy, each of us is being called to stand in that crowd and hear the "good news" of John's call to repentance. We should examine our lives, asking from our hearts as they did: "What should we do?" Our repentance should spring not from our fear of coming wrath (see [Luke 3:7–9](#)) but from a joyful sense of the nearness of our saving God. This theme resounds through today's readings: "Rejoice! . . . The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all," we hear in today's Epistle. In today's Responsorial, we hear again the call to be joyful, unafraid at the Lord's coming among us. In today's First Reading, we hear echoes of the angel's Annunciation to Mary. The prophet's words are very close to the angel's greeting (compare [Luke 1:28–31](#)). Mary is the Daughter Zion—the favored one of God, told not to fear but to rejoice that the Lord is with her, "a mighty Savior." She is the cause of our joy. For in her draws near the Messiah, as John had promised: "One mightier than I is coming."*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our study for the third Sunday of Advent, a time of preparation. let us pray from Psalm 96:

All: Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and what fills it resound; let the plains be joyful and all that is in them. Then let the trees of the forest rejoice before the Lord who comes, who comes to govern the earth; to govern the world with justice and the peoples with faithfulness. Amen.

Leader: Today we celebrate Gaudete Sunday, or Rejoice Sunday. This week's Scripture passages invite us to give thanks to God by expressing our joy. The key to choosing to be joyful is to remember and be grateful for all that God has done for us. Reflect on some of the things God has done for us as you watch the video from Tim Gray.

Quote from the Early Church Fathers: *Jesus baptizes Christians with the Holy Spirit and fire*, by Cyril of Jerusalem, 430-543 A.D.

"John, filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, was sanctified for the purpose of baptizing the Lord. John himself did not impart the Spirit but preached the glad tidings of him who does. He says, 'I indeed baptize you with water, for repentance. But he who is coming after me, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Luke 3:16, Matthew 3:11). Why fire? Because the descent of the Holy Spirit was in fiery tongues [at Pentecost Acts 2:3]. Concerning this the Lord says with joy, 'I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it would be kindled!' (Luke 12:49)" (excerpt from *CATECHETICAL LECTURES 17.8*)

(Play the video on [FORMED.org](#) - [Opening the Word – Third Sunday of Advent \(Year C\)](#))

FIRST READING ~ Zephaniah 3:14-18a ~

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.

Sunday is 'Gaudete' Sunday when the pink candle of the Advent Wreath is lit. The third Sunday of Advent takes its name from the first word of the entrance antiphon - 'Rejoice'. This theme is found in the first two readings. We are reminded that the joyful coming of Christ is drawing nearer.

This weekend is the only time every 3 years we hear this beautiful passage from the Prophet Zephaniah. Zion is the name for Jerusalem, and Christians understand Jerusalem signifies God's people. Replace 'Zion' and 'Jerusalem' prayerfully with your own name.

- How does this prophecy make you feel? What line strikes you the most? Why?

SECOND READING ~ Philippians 4:4-7 ~

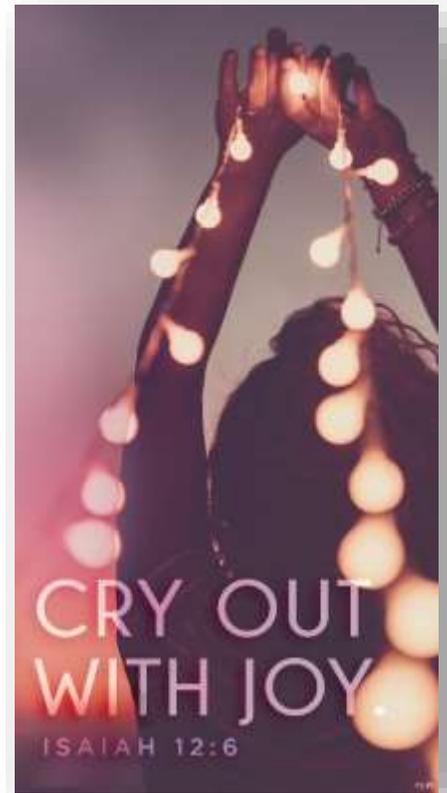
Brothers and sisters: Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

St Paul is writing to the Philippians trying to resolve an argument between two women which is destroying the unity of the Christian community. He puts their argument into the big picture. Rejoicing, kindness, and no anxiety are trademarks of Christianity. Paul reminds the community that each member is to reflect Christ. In the hostile town of Philippi, they are to be attractive and lead people to Christ – not turn them off.

- Is your kindness known to all? Do you have anxieties that you refuse to make known and truly hand over to him?

GOSPEL ~ Luke 3:10-18 ~

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.



A practice of Advent preparation is celebrating forgiveness. Crowds gathered to be with John the Baptist, not in the Temple, but by the Jordan River. Hungry for God and for the world to experience change they claimed their own need for conversion: what should we do? John directs their attention toward care of the poor - sharing clothing and food.

- *What do you have plenty of? Who has none? Have you ever desired to simplify your life and be more generous? What happened?*

John baptizes and cleanses with water. Jesus baptizes and cleanses with the Holy Spirit and fire. Water and Fire.

- *What would you choose? Fire purifies through hot temperatures. What have been hot, purifying moments for you this year? What wisdom have you been led into? What parts of your life would you like to bring to God for reconciliation at the end of the year?*

A common practice in the time of Jesus was for disciples to carry the sandals of their teacher. John shares he is not even worthy to undo the straps of Jesus' sandals let alone carry them!

- *Whose sandals do you carry? Who do you listen to as your teacher? What life lessons or teaching would you like to ask about at this point in your life journey?*

MEDITATION

Why did thousands come out to hear John the Baptist preach? And what was so unusual about his message? When John the Baptist appeared on the public scene and began to prophesy the whole nation of Israel took notice. It had been many hundreds of years since a prophet had spoken out and performed signs in the land of Israel. John broke the long silence with the sudden announcement that the Messiah (God's Anointed One) was about to appear. God had long ago promised his people through the patriarchs of the old covenant (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), and through the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, etc.) and rulers of Israel (Moses, David), that he would send them a Redeemer who would save them from their sins, free them from oppression, fill them with the joy of his presence (Zephaniah 3:17), and bring them his everlasting kingdom of peace and righteousness.

The people recognized that John was an extraordinary man of God and a true prophet who spoke in God's name. They came out to hear the "good news" (Luke 3:18) which he preached to them. And they willingly submitted to his baptism of repentance at the River Jordan where he preached. John's task was to wake people up from spiritual sleep and indifference, and to turn them back to hear God's voice and obey his commandments. John wanted the people to be in a good place to receive the Messiah and follow him.

John's message of renewal and repentance was very practical. He told the people three things: First, every follower of God must share what they possess (their personal goods and resources) with their neighbors, especially with those who lacked the basic necessities of life. John recognized that this was a key duty for every individual and an outward expression of the great commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18).

Second, John pointed out the sacred duty to give each and every person what is their due and to not take from them what rightfully belongs to them. God commands that

each person be treated with respect and that honor be given where honor is due. John told the tax collectors that they must not coerce people to pay more tax money than what was rightfully due. (Tax collectors often made handsome profits for themselves by overcharging other people.) John instructed soldiers to not abuse their authority or power to compel people to give or do things for them beyond what was rightful and their due. (It was not uncommon for soldiers to abuse their position to force people to carry their heavy equipment for them or to rob them of their goods.) John did not tell them to leave their profession, but to be good, honest, and respectful soldiers.

And thirdly, John exhorted his listeners to be content with what they had and to avoid coveting (wrongfully desiring or acquiring) what belonged to others. John basically called the people to turn back to God and to walk in his way of love and righteousness. John's baptism was for repentance - turning away from sin and taking on a new way of life according to God's word. John said that the Messiah would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Fire in biblical times was associated with God and with his action in the world and in the lives of his people. God sometimes manifested his presence by use of fire, such as the burning bush which was not consumed when God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2). The image of fire was also used to symbolize God's glory (Ezekiel 1:4, 13), his protective presence (2 Kings 6:17), his holiness (Deuteronomy. 4:24), his righteous judgment (Zechariah 13:9), and his wrath against sin (Isaiah 66:15-16).

Our baptism in Jesus Christ by water and the Spirit results in a new birth and entry into God's kingdom as his beloved sons and daughters (John 3:5). Jesus is ready to give us the fire of his Spirit that we may radiate the joy of the Gospel to a world in desperate need of God's light and truth. The word of God has power to change and transform our lives that we may be lights pointing others to Jesus Christ, the true light of the world (John 8:12). Like John the Baptist, we too are called to give testimony to the light and truth of Jesus Christ.

- *What does Baptism mean to you? How does the season of Advent call us to live out or prepare for our baptismal promises more faithfully?*
- *Do you point others to Jesus Christ in the way you speak and live?*
- *Do you want to be on fire for God and for the return of the Lord Jesus when he comes in his glory?*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray that we may slow down during Advent and enjoy the time God has given us. Let us not lose focus on what is most important...

ALL: Lord Jesus, let your light burn brightly in my heart that I may know the joy and freedom of your kingdom. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and empower me to witness the truth of your gospel and to point others to the light of Christ. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

[Discussion questions created by Fr Frank Bird sm, Marist Priest, and distributed by www.maristlitynz.org, were shared with permission from www.livingtheword.org.nz.]

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