

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT



God of Truth

God of truth,
you help us to see ourselves for who
we are
in our selfishness and sinfulness.
We are stung
and left to ask,
“What should we do?”
Strengthen us to follow your
Great Commandment:
to love you, Lord,
with all our heart, with all our soul,
with all our mind, and all our strength,
and our neighbor as ourselves.
Save us from your judgment
and instead rejoice over us
as we rejoice in your great kindness.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 16, 2018

Rejoice! The Lord is near



Today's Readings: Zephaniah 3:14–18a; Isaiah 12:2–3, 4, 5–6; Philippians 4:4–7; Luke 3:10–18. The people who gather around John the Baptist are both stung by his words and attracted by what he is saying. Their self-interest and avarice have led them to dishonest practices, but now they seem willing to leave those ways behind to welcome the Christ.

John assures them that, although he is not the Christ, another is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. The anticipation is building, and we can imagine their excitement as they await his coming.

Excitement is building in the Church as we move through Advent. This Third Sunday of Advent is called “Gaudete,” a word that means “rejoice.” St. Paul tells us why: “the Lord is near.” We know, as John’s disciples only hoped,

that the Lord has come and lived among us as one of us. That alone is cause for rejoicing. We also know that he died and was raised from the dead, and he shares his risen life with us through the Baptism promised by John. More reason to rejoice! But since God has extravagant love, there is more. Jesus has promised he will return, that there will be new heavens and a new earth, and God will be “all in all.” We wait for that day, the Parousia, rejoicing that the Lord is near.

As you light the rose-colored candle on your Advent wreath this week, recall the day when you were baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire. What words and signs help you to know that the Lord was near on that day and continues to be with you? How is your life different because of your Baptism? Are you on fire with love for God?



THIS WEEK AT HOME

Monday, December 17 Meet Jesus' Family

In the Middle East, even today, people care about family history. They don't want to know so much "who are you?" as "whose are you?" Matthew obliges by giving us Jesus' family tree. To fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah, he must come from the line of King David. Since Abraham is the father of all Jews, the genealogy must go back to him. What does Jesus' genealogy tell us about our heritage? Whose are we? *Today's Readings: Genesis 49:2, 8–10; Psalm 72:1–2, 3–4ab, 7–8, 17; Matthew 1:1–17.*

Tuesday, December 18 A Righteous Man

Today we hear an account of Jesus' birth from Joseph's perspective, including his dream in which an angel spoke to him. Matthew calls Joseph "a righteous man," and his deeds show him to be so: He does not want to expose Mary to shame. He listens to the angel, and he follows the angel's commands. How does God make his will known to us? Are we listening? Are we willing to do something that might be difficult? *Today's Readings: Jeremiah 23:5–8; Psalm 72:1–2, 12–13, 18–19; Matthew 1:18–25.*

Wednesday, December 19 Flower of Jesse's Stem

The "O" Antiphons have for centuries been part of Evening Prayer from December 17 to 23. Each gives a title to Christ, links him to Isaiah's prophecy, and implores him to "come!" Today we pray, "O Flower of Jesse's stem, you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; kings stand silent in your presence; the nations bow down in worship before you. Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid." Christ, who like King David descended from Jesse, is a king of a different order, adored by all nations. It is hard to wait for such a king! *Today's Readings: Judges 13:2–7, 24–25a; Psalm 71:3–4a, 5–6ab, 16–17; Luke 1:5–25.*

Thursday, December 20 Do Not Be Afraid

In Luke's account of the Annunciation, Mary is initially troubled at the angel's greeting; but after Gabriel assures her she has nothing to fear, she consents to be the mother of the Messiah. St. John writes: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18a). Mary's perfect love for God allows her to accept God's plan for her life. Do your fears hold you back from giving your life totally to Jesus? *Today's Readings: Isaiah 7:10–14; Psalm 24:1–2, 3–4ab, 5–6; Luke 1:26–38.*

Friday, December 21 Leaping for Joy

Song of Songs uses poetic images for the love between God, the lover, and his people, the beloved. In *The History of the Kingdom of God: From Creation to Parousia*, theologian Sofia Cavalletti writes, "A plan has always existed in the mind of God, the aim of which is to bring humankind to the full enjoyment of God." While we await that day, we can enjoy God's presence now. John leaps for joy in his mother's womb in recognition of Jesus, just as the lover in the Song of Songs leaps across the hills on his way to the beloved. *Today's Readings: Song of Songs 2:8–14; Psalm 33:2–3, 11–12, 20–21; Luke 1:39–45.*

Saturday, December 22 The Greatness of the Lord

Have you ever felt a strong desire to praise God—perhaps while on a mountaintop or at the birth of a child? When Mary hears Elizabeth's greeting, she is overcome with that desire. As she proclaims the Magnificat, she praises God for his holiness, justice, and great deeds. Her prayer reveals so much about our God and offers such perfect praise that the Church prays it each day at Evening Prayer. *Today's Readings: 1 Samuel 1:24–28; 1 Samuel 2:1, 4–5, 6–7, 8abcd; Luke 1:46–56.*

