

# Holy Eucharist

December 12, 2021

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85887946777?pwd=eig4MEdsMUh6clV6b2dUblFOQ3l2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 858 8794 6777

Passcode: 782611

## Advent 3C

### Prelude

### Announcements

*All stand as they are able*

### Opening Hymn

Hymnal 71

*Hark! the glad sound!*

1 Hark! the glad sound! the Sa - vior comes, the Sa - vior  
2 He comes, the pri - soners to re - lease in Sa - tan's  
3 He comes, the bro - ken heart to bind, the bleed - ing  
4 Our glad ho - san - nas, Prince of Peace, thy wel - come

prom - ised long: let ev - ery heart pre -  
bond - age held; the gates of brass be -  
soul to cure; and with the trea - sures  
shall pro - claim; and heaven's e - ter - nal

pare a throne, and ev - ery voice a song.  
 fore him burst, the i - ron fet - ters yield.  
 of his grace, to en - rich the hum - ble poor.  
 arch - es ring with thy be - lov - ed Name.

*Presider* Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*People* **And blessed be God's reign, now and for ever. Amen.**

*The Presider begins the Collect for Purity*

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: **Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

Chris - te e - lei - son. Ky - ri - e e - lei - son.

### Collect of the Day

*Presider* The Lord be with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

*Presider* Let us pray.

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

*All sit.*

## **First Reading**

Zephaniah 3:14-20

A Reading from the book of the prophet Zephaniah.

<sup>14</sup>Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter Jerusalem!  
<sup>15</sup>The LORD has taken away the judgments against you,  
he has turned away your enemies.  
The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;  
you shall fear disaster no more.  
<sup>16</sup>On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
Do not fear, O Zion;  
do not let your hands grow weak.  
<sup>17</sup>The LORD, your God, is in your midst,  
a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness,  
he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing  
<sup>18</sup>as on a day of festival.  
I will remove disaster from you,  
so that you will not bear reproach for it.  
<sup>19</sup>I will deal with all your oppressors  
at that time.  
And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.  
<sup>20</sup>At that time I will bring you home,  
at the time when I gather you;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes, says the LORD.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

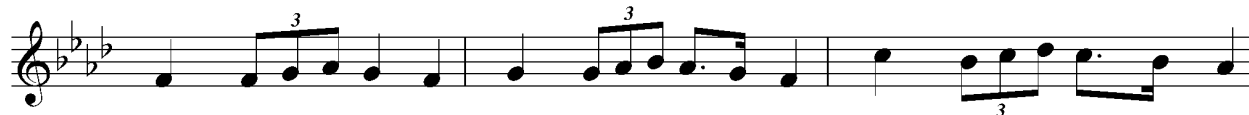
People **Thanks be to God.**

Remain seated

**Canticle 9**

**Hymnal 381**

*Surely it is God who saves me*



Sure-ly it is God who saves me; trust-ing him, I  
Make his deeds known to the peo-ple; tell out his ex-



shall not fear. For the Lord de-fends and shields me  
-alt-ed Name. Praise the Lord, who has done great things;



and his sav-ing help is near. So re-joice as you draw  
all his works his might pro-claim. Zion, lift your voice in



wat-er from sal-va-tion's liv-ing spring; in the day of  
sing-ing; for with you has come to dwell, in your ver-y



your de-live-rance thank the Lord, God's mer-cies sing.  
midst, the great and Ho-ly One of Is-ra-el.

**Second Reading**

Philippians 4:4-7

A Reading from Paul's letter to the Church in Philippi.

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

*Reader* The Word of the Lord.

*People* **Thanks be to God.**

*All stand as they are able.*

## Sequence Hymn

Hymnal 56

*O come, O come, Emmanuel*

1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som  
 5 O come, thou Key of Da - vid, come, and o - pen  
 6 O come, thou Day - spring from on high, and cheer us

1 cap - tive Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile  
 5 wide our heaven - ly home; make safe the way that leads on  
 6 by thy draw - ing nigh; dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of

1 here un - til the Son of God ap - pear.  
 5 high, and close the path to mis - er - y. Re - joice! Re - joice!  
 6 night, and death's dark shad - ow put to flight.

Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

## Holy Gospel

Luke 3:7-18

*Gospeller* The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to Luke.

*People* **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

<sup>7</sup>John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup>Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

<sup>10</sup>And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” <sup>11</sup>In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” <sup>12</sup>Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup>He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” <sup>14</sup>Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

<sup>15</sup>As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup>John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

<sup>18</sup>So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

*Gospeller*    The Gospel of the Lord.  
*People*        **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

## **Sermon**

## **Nicene Creed**

*All stand as they are able.*

*Presider*     Let us affirm the faith of the Church using the words of the Nicene Creed:

**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 the People**

*All remain standing as they are able.*

*Presider:* Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Surely, it is God who saves us; therefore, we joyfully pray to the Lord, “God our salvation: we thank you.”

*Intercessor* Though hindered by our sins, and in need of your bountiful grace and mercy, you never leave us. You are ever in our midst. Renew your Church in love. Bless our Bishops Bonnie, Michael, Justin, Moises, Elizabeth, Donald and Craig. Bless all ministers, priests, deacons, ministry teams, those in formation; and our brothers and sisters worshipping at St Matthew’s, Nizao, and St Mark’s, Haina, in the Dominican Republic. God our salvation: **we thank you.**

*Silence is kept.*

Make your deeds known among the people, O God. Save the lame; gather the outcast. May the exiles know home, and all people know your peace. May your springs of

salvation renew the earth. Heal our planet and restore in us a sense of responsibility and gratitude. God our salvation: **we thank you.**

*Silence is kept.*

Merciful God, give us grace to heed the warnings of those calling us to be better stewards of your creation. We thank you for all you have made, especially those things that sustain and better our lives. God our salvation: **we thank you.**

*Silence is kept.*

Merciful God, in this month of great excess and consumerism, call the financial and business communities to act justly and generously. Grant that those without coats be clothed, and those without food be fed. God our salvation: **we thank you.**

*Silence is kept.*

Merciful God, you lead us with joy; you delight in our joy. We give you thanks for [\_\_\_\_\_] and for all your boundless blessings.

O God, you have done great things. With thankful hearts we pray to you for those burdened by illness, shame, grief, or weakness [especially \_\_\_\_\_]. Be for them a stronghold and a sure defense.

God our salvation, gather us, with all those who have died, into your sacred heart. We pray especially for \_\_\_\_\_. Grant us to sing your praises for all eternity.

*Silence is kept.*

God our salvation: **we thank you.**

*Presider:* O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

## **Confession of Sin**

*A Minister says*

Let us confess our sins to God.

*Silence is kept.*



*Minister and People*

**Most merciful God,  
we confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
have mercy on us and forgive us;  
that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

*A Priest stands and says*

Almighty God have mercy on you, + forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

## **Peace**

*All stand as they are able.*

*Presider* The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
*People* **And also with you.**

*Then the Ministers and the People may greet one another in the name of the Lord.*

***The People then are seated.***

## **Holy Communion**

*The Presider then says*

Let us with gladness present the offerings and oblations of our life and labor to the Lord.

*How the Holy Communion is prepared*

The Presider, other Eucharistic Ministers, and any participating Acolytes must wash their hands, or use hand sanitizer, before celebrating and before distribution. Gloves will not be used.

All of the elements for Holy Communion will be placed on the Altar for the Eucharistic Prayer. The Presider alone stands at the altar, with others 6 feet or more away.

The **priest's wafer and chalice** will be uncovered in front of the Presider during the Eucharistic Prayer. They **are for the Presider alone**. They are consumed entirely by the Presider, or appropriately disposed of after the service.

The priest's wafer and the people's wafers will be kept separate at all times. The **people's wafers will be a container** on the Altar, which will remain covered throughout the Eucharistic Prayer.

During consecration, the Presider will touch the container, not the wafers.

The **distribution** of consecrated wine is not permitted at this time (as of June 19, 2020 Diocese of Michigan directive).

### *How the Holy Communion will be distributed*

Everyone distributing communion will use hand sanitizer before they begin distribution. Gloves will not be used.

Communicants will be encouraged to use hand sanitizer before receiving. Hand sanitizer will be available at the service.

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The people will come to the Altar rail as they are able. The Minister will place the bread in the hand. The distribution will happen without directly touching the hand of the person receiving. Hand-to-mouth distribution is not permitted. If hand-to-hand contact happens, the minister will re-sanitize.

If a blessing is preferred, the blessing will be given without touch.

***The people stand as they are able as a minister brings forward the alms basin.***

## **Offertory Hymn**

Doxology

**Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God above, you heavenly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

*The people remain standing.*

## Great Thanksgiving

*Presider* The Lord be with you.

*People* **And also with you.**

*Presider* Lift up your hearts.

*People* **We lift them to the Lord.**

*Presider* Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

*People* **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Surely it is you, Lord God, who saves us, for you are our stronghold and our sure defense, and you shall be our Savior forever.

From bondage and then from exile you brought your people home; you gave Zion a song, filled Jerusalem with joy, and renewed your children in praise.

When your creation was captive to sin, you sent your Son to restore your people: upon the cross he bore the sin of the world, and through his resurrection you have become our salvation.

In your love and by your Spirit, you have opened the wells of salvation to flow through all the earth with the water of rejoicing.

And so we give you thanks with the saints of every age and exalt you in the company of heaven as we join their unending hymn.

## Sanctus

Hymnal S-129

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow - er and  
might, hea - ven and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho -  
san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who  
comes in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.\_\_\_\_\_

*The people continue to stand, or kneel, as they are able.*

*The Presider continues*

Gathering God, as grain is collected from the fields, in your Son you draw us to yourself; and as that grain is drawn together, in this holy meal you make us one.

Send your Holy Spirit † upon your church to make us your harvest of righteousness.

Sanctify this bread and cup that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ our Lord;

who, at supper with his disciples, took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to his friends, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper, he took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Great is the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

*The Presider continues*

Holy One of Israel, you are the great one in our midst.

Come and dwell among those who long to know you amid toil and strife. Where your loved ones have been exiled by judgments against them, remove every fear from their hearts and give them hope.

Where your daughters and sons face the threat of enemies, show them how best to love their persecutors.

Where oppression has turned your children into outcasts, gather them in your arms and carry them home.

Bring us to that day when shame turns to praise and all creation resounds with rejoicing in your midst,

Holy One, eternal Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



*The Presider then continues*

As our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold 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.  
Breaking of the Bread**

*A period of silence is kept.*

*The Presider says*

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;  
**Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.**

These are the Gifts of God.  
**And we are the people of God.**

And in union and solidarity with your faithful people  
who are not able to be present at this table, we pray together:  
**Strengthen and sustain us with your grace, Lord Christ,  
and let us never be separated from you.**

Come spiritually into all of our hearts, Lord Christ.

**May we live in you, and you in us, in this life, and in the life to come.  
Amen.**

*All baptized persons are welcome to receive Holy Communion.*

*After Communion, the Presider says*

Let us pray.

*Presider and People*

**Eternal God, heavenly Father,  
you have graciously accepted us as living members  
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ,  
and you have fed us with spiritual food  
in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.  
Send us now into the world in peace,  
and grant us strength and courage  
to love and serve you  
with gladness and singleness of heart;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### **Blessing**

*A priest blesses the people, saying*

God of hope, when Christ your Son appears may he not find us asleep or idle,  
but active in his service.

And may the blessing of the Holy One who made you,  
†Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer be with you today and always. **Amen.**

### **Concluding Hymn**

Hymnal 481

*Rejoice, the Lord is King*

Re- joyce, the Lord is King! The Sov-ereign One a- dore! Mor-  
God's king-dom can- not fail; he rules o'er earth and heav'n; the  
Re- joyce in glor-ious hope! Our Lord the Judge shall come, and

-tals, give thanks and sing, and triumph ev- er- more. Lift up your  
 keys of death and hell to Je-sus Christ are giv'n. Lift up your  
 take his child-ren up to their e- ter- nal home. Lift up your

heart! lift up your voice! Re- joice! A- gain I say, re- joice!  
 heart! lift up your voice! Re- joice! A- gain I say, re- joice!  
 heart! lift up your voice! Re- joice! A- gain I say, re- joice!

**Dismissal**

*Minister* My brothers and my sisters, let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.  
*People* **Thanks be to God.**

**Postlude**

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**Faith in Action** continues to provide leadership in collecting donations to support households in need in the Chelsea and Dexter areas. They are in need of our continuing help. You may bring your donations to FIA, or to Nancy who will see that they get there. **If you bring food directly to FIA**, please let Nancy know, so she can continue to keep our records of donation. If you write a check, please make it to *Faith In Action*. The **next Food Drive at the church is December 19**. Please contribute as generously as you can.

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**Compline** will be prayed together on Zoom on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. Use this link, or the phone-in information to join your siblings in Christ in this quiet and brief service:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86179980160?pwd=YVhPR2FWMDhsOEpsUkhBZ3RuYXV1Zzo9> Meeting ID: 861 7998 0160 Passcode: 046006

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**A reminder** that our Social Time is active every Tuesday evening from 7:00-7:30 on Zoom! The link can be found on the church web site calendar, and also here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86367804283?pwd=eW9jelFKTTdaaUlXRozxMEc1NlM3Zz09>

Meeting ID: 863 6780 4283, Passcode: 894503

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**Episcopal Relief & Development's** 2021 Advent Toolkit includes weekly opportunities to create, learn and pray. There are DIY projects for families and communities that will take you from Advent to Christmas and through Epiphany. Explore resources, the 2021 *Gifts for Life* Catalog and more at [episcopalrelief.org/advent](http://episcopalrelief.org/advent).

ERD also continues to support partners in targeted local responses to needs created by Hurricane Ida. The organization is partnering with New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) to provide aid to impacted people in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and the Bronx and the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana to support marginalized communities throughout the state.

To support the work of Episcopal Relief & Development, donate online at [episcopalrelief.org/match](http://episcopalrelief.org/match). Between now and December 31, eligible contributions up to \$650,000 will be matched.

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### **Upcoming Commemorations**

- December 12 Francis de Sales, Bishop, and Jane de Chantal, Monastic,  
Workers of Charity, 1622 & 1641
- 13 Lucy of Syracuse, Martyr, 304
- 14 John of the Cross, Mystic and Monastic Reformer, 1591
- 15 John Horden: Bishop and Missionary in Canada, 1893;  
Robert McDonald: Priest, 1913; and, Nino of Georgia, Missionary, c.332
- 16 Ralph Adams Cram, 1942, and Richard Upjohn, 1878, Architects; and,  
John LaFarge, Artist, 1910
- 17 Dorothy L. Sayers, Apologist & Spiritual Writer, 1957;  
William Lloyd Garrison, 1879, and Maria Stewart, 1879,  
Prophetic Witnesses

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BIBLE STUDIES  
THAT WORK

## Advent 3C      December 12, 2021

**Zephaniah 3:14-20; Canticle 9; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18**

During Advent and Christmas, we will be using study prompts and other activities tied to the sermon for the week. Read the sermon aloud and follow-up with spoken responses to the two questions at the end. Find our full sermon compilation for individual, small group, or congregational use, *Sermons for Advent and Christmas 2021* at [www.sermonsthatwork.org](http://www.sermonsthatwork.org).

**Advent Joy** by the Rev. Marcea Paul

The Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally known as Gaudete Sunday. “*Gaudete*,” when translated from Latin, means “rejoice”. We know that Advent is a season of waiting, and today we are called to be joyful as we await the coming of Jesus Christ.

God, through Zephaniah, offers us glimpses of a hopeful future and calls us to “Rejoice and exult with all our heart.” Isaiah reminds us of the ways God has delivered us, is delivering us, and will deliver us. He invites us to shout aloud and sing for joy because we shall “draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.” And our cheerleader, St. Paul, strongly urges us to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”

We have been experiencing tough times these last few years. With the suffering, loss, uncertainty, and state of our beautiful and broken world, how can we hear these words and rejoice?

In our minds, joy tends to overlap with happiness. Happiness is often connected with what is happening to us and around us. Happiness usually lasts for just a season. When we are discouraged and afraid, rejoicing in the Lord can be a hard sell. But the truth is that joy is not usually inspired by happy circumstances. Poet and author David Whyte writes, “To feel a full and untrammled joy is to have become fully generous; to allow our selves to be joyful is to have walked through the doorway of fear.” And joy, unlike happiness, lasts – no matter what the challenges.

The prophets looked forward to the day of the Lord’s coming as a time of great joy. Even Zephaniah, who has been called the most despondent of the prophets, kept the last word for joy—joy over the Lord’s presence, joy over renewal and restoration, and joy over coming home. While Isaiah also speaks of doom and gloom, he looks forward to the Lord’s coming as a time for shouting joyfully, “Surely God is my salvation.” Isaiah looks forward to the Lord’s coming as a day when the people would drink their fill of salvation like someone drawing fresh water from a well – certainly a day of great rejoicing.

It is believed that the Apostle Paul was under house arrest when he wrote the words we heard from his letter to the Philippians. And still, Paul could say, “Rejoice!” One might wonder what he had to rejoice about in that situation. Well, Paul rejoiced because he looked forward to the Lord’s coming, but he also rejoiced because the Lord is always near. Paul seemed to have

experienced the Lord's constant presence in his imprisonment. And so, he could say, "Rejoice!" Paul carried the joy of Advent with him wherever he went – even in a Roman jail.

Advent is not only a season for waiting. It is also a time of preparation – a time of looking for the coming of the Lord, for the fulfillment of God's promised restoration, for the peace that overcomes all violence, and for that perfect love that casts out fear.

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He was sent into difficult, complicated times – times like we are experiencing. And his message was simple: repent; turn your lives around; turn back to God. For John, repentance was not about beating ourselves up for things done or left undone; to repent meant total transformation – transformation that bears fruit.

Snakes are what John the Baptist calls the people who venture into the desert: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Yet, they do not turn and run. Instead, they listen to his sermon. You must bear fruit, he tells them. Do not rely on your ancestry, your tradition, or your history. This is about you preparing yourselves for the One who is to come. When John finished preaching, they asked "How do we repent?" "What should we do?"

John doesn't ask the people to change the world, but rather to change themselves. He doesn't tell them to leave their lives and stay with him or start a revolution; he tells the crowds who came to him to consider sharing what they have with the cold and hungry. He told the tax collectors to be honest and fair. The soldiers, he cautioned to act with integrity, avoiding abuse of their power. "Go home," John told them. Go home to your families, your neighbors, your vocations, your friends. Go home and live your lives as deeply and as generously as you can right now. Do what the Lord requires of you and do it now. Be generous *now* - Be merciful *now* - Do justice *now*.

What does this all mean for us? In this Advent season, are we seeking the answers to the question "What should we do?" As we wait and as we look forward to the coming of the Messiah, are we engaging in the kind of deep self-reflection that leads to action? Or have we fallen into complacency? Are we gathering like the crowds in John's story, moving toward genuine repentance? Or are we turning away? In our baptisms, we are marked as Christ's own forever, and it is the meaning of this mark that John called his followers to embrace – and is calling us to embrace. Through baptism, we are cleansed and renewed with water from the springs of salvation before being sent out to serve.

We might think that focusing our attention on what we long for but do not yet have might be a cause for discouragement rather than joy. But, perhaps, it is that very act of watching and waiting and looking for the coming of God that inspires great joy. The Gospel writer calls John's exhortation "good news." And it is, especially if we believe that we are not worthy of God's saving grace. Nothing in our lives is beyond redemption. Knowing and accepting this is reason enough for rejoicing.

This is not easy. That's why it takes intentional preparation and repentance – which means amending our lives and turning toward God. That is what we must do to prepare in this holy season. Advent is beckoning us to do just that, and it encourages us with a promise, rather than a threat: the promise of the coming embrace of Christ and the gift of abundant life that he brings.

John the Baptist appeared as an itinerant preacher. Yet, ironically, he is remembered by the Church as the patron saint of spiritual joy. Perhaps he earned that title since, earlier in Luke’s gospel, Elizabeth voiced how the baby in her womb leaped for joy at the presence of Mary and Jesus. It was John’s great joy to always be pointing to Jesus. Today, it is our great joy to be waiting for the coming of Jesus.

On this Gaudete Sunday, as we wait and prepare, we are also called to rejoice. The coming of the Messiah and the Gospel of Jesus Christ are the Good News the angel will speak of when appearing to the shepherds, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.” This brings us hope even amid our struggles so that when the Christ child arrives at the manger, we can rejoice and sing with gusto, “Joy to the world! The Lord is come.” For now, we pray, “Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us.”

1. *When was the last time you felt joy as the Rev. Marcea Paul describes it? Where were you? Describe the place, its look, its smell, its sounds. Who else was there? Give God thanks for this joy and the people who were part of it.*

2. *Take a small piece of paper and write, “Rejoice!” on it. Carry it with you – in your pocket or purse or wallet or even shoe! – to remind you of the joy that characterizes this week.*

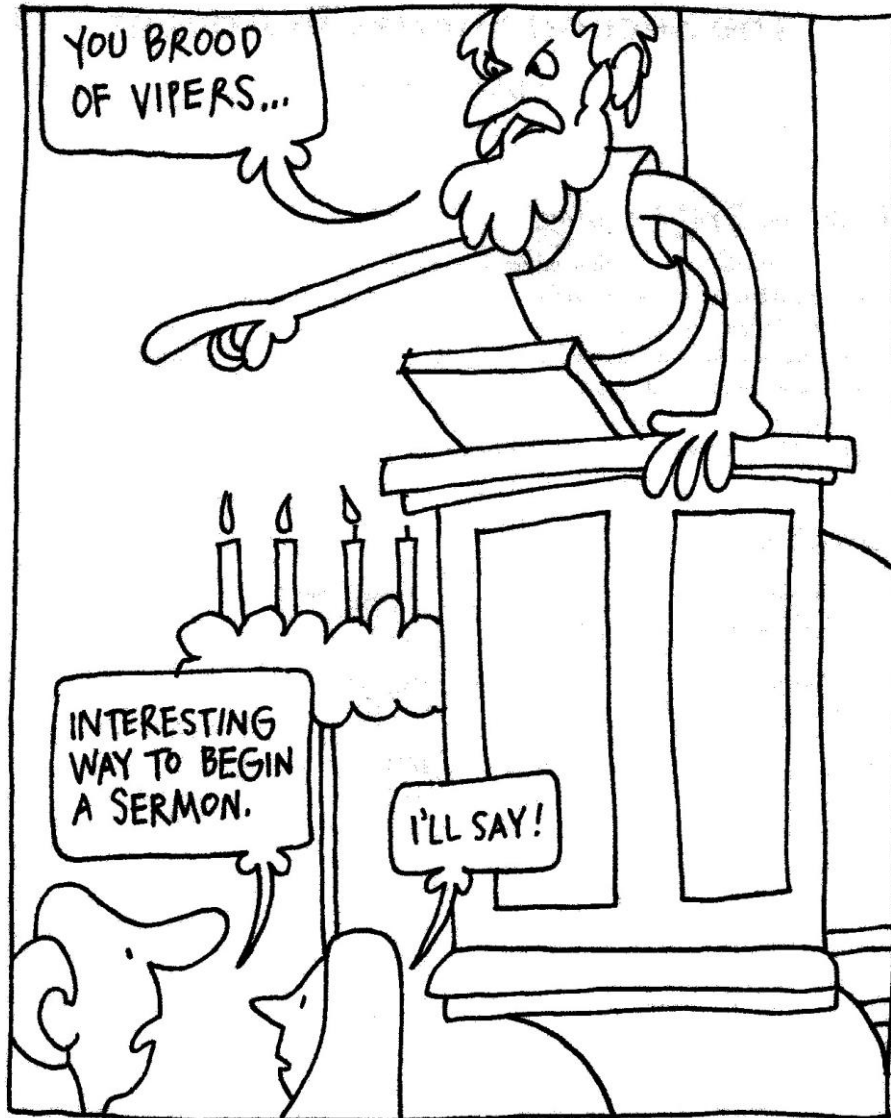
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## Our Mission:

We seek to grow as diverse disciples of Jesus Christ, and to serve Jesus by serving others in the world, guided by the values of Ancient Rites, Open Minds, and Affirming Hearts.



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