

Third Sunday of Advent



A Prayer for Joy and Courage

God our Father,
you who will rejoice over us
as people rejoice on a festival day,
renew us with your love
and give us your own joy.
You who are in our midst,
help us recognize the traces
of your presence
so that we can learn your will.

We ask, as the crowds asked John,
“What then should we do?”
Lead us to creative responses.
Help us to confront courageously
the poverty and inequalities around us.
Show us where we need to be
more generous.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 16, 2012 Giving and Rejoicing with the Lord

Today's Readings: Zephaniah 3:14–18a; Responsorial Psalm: Isaiah 12:2–3, 4, 5–6 (6); Philippians 4:4–7; Luke 3:10–18. The question put to John, “What then should we do?” takes on special meaning for people who live in the relative affluence of the United States. For the top twenty percent of the economic pyramid, who own eighty-four percent of the wealth, the answer may mean more than sharing an extra coat. How frivolous some possessions and activities appear when considering the wants of others!

But it's easy to advise the affluent. What about the rest of us? Are extra coats, shirts, or sweaters lurking at the back of the closet? A good Advent practice might be making a

clean sweep, with the superfluous goods given to a clothing drive or charitable thrift store.

All of us, regardless of income, can consider today's theme: joy. Both Zephaniah and the Letter to the Philippians call us to joy, as today's rose vestments make visible. Perhaps we could think about what brings us genuine joy. The answer is different for each individual: music, naps, ice cream, pine trees, fishing, outdoor walks, novels, puppies, sunsets, streams, basketball, dancing, smiles, watching waves. Making a personal list might surprise us: lots of joyous experiences are free. And any could be a springboard to the joy of the Lord.



This Week at Home

Monday, December 17 Multicultural Customs

Around the world, Christian practices anticipate Christ's birth. Mexicans have *Las Posadas* (a procession enacting the Holy Family's search for shelter), Puerto Ricans have the *Parrandas* (a caroling party), and Filipinos have *Simbang Gabi*, (a nine-day novena to Mary). The universal Church chants the O Antiphons at Evening Prayer urging Christ, under various titles, to come quickly. Today's begins: "O Wisdom . . . Come and show your people the way to salvation." Today's Readings: Genesis 49:2, 8–10; Psalm 72:1–2, 3–4ab, 7–8, 17 (see 7); Matthew 1:1–17.

Tuesday, December 18 Of Timeless Circles and Large Hearts

Many festive markings of Christmas are circular: wreaths, cakes, cookies, or carols sung in rounds. When time to "get everything done" seems scarce, they can help us envision God's timeless, eternal world—like an unending circle.

The popular saying "There are no small parts; only small players," describes Joseph in today's Gospel. What if he had played his part in a small-minded way? Mary might have been stoned to death. He inspires us to play our parts, whatever they are, with large hearts. Today's Readings: Jeremiah 23:5–8; Psalm 72:1–2, 12–13, 18–19 (see 7); Matthew 1:18–25.

Wednesday, December 19 The Flowering Stem

Did you ever see a green leaf on a branch which seemed lifeless? That is the image today's O Antiphon suggests in addressing Jesus: "O Flower of Jesse's stem." (Jesse was an ancestor of Jesus.) Even in areas where we thought ourselves depleted or lifeless, (a relationship, goal, dream, skill, or creative outlet) shoots of new life can still spring forth.

Elizabeth and Zechariah were too old to imagine themselves parents, but in today's Gospel, they are promised a child. Even in winter, natural greenery adorns church and home: poinsettias, fir trees, paper whites, pine branches. In them we see and smell the message: don't give up hope! Today's Readings: Judges 13:2–7, 24–25a; Psalm 71:3–4a, 5–6ab, 16–17 (see 8); Luke 1:5–25.

Thursday, December 20 "How Can This Be?"

If fear or frustration creeps into the Christmas preparations, remember that it all began with Mary's own puzzled confusion. Like us, she didn't know how the story would end. Today's Readings: Isaiah 7:10–14; Psalm 24:1–2, 3–4ab, 5–6 (see 7c and 10b); Luke 1:26–38.

Friday, December 21 The Year's Turning Point

On the shortest day of the year, the O Antiphon prays, "O Radiant Dawn . . . Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death." Soon, days will grow longer. That light, combined with the Savior's coming, is reason for joy. Savor that joy by singing an Advent hymn (<http://www.hymntime.com/tch/top/advent.htm>). Today's Readings: Song of Songs 2:8–14 or Zephaniah 3:14–18a; Psalm 33:2–3, 11–12, 20–21 (1a; 3a); Luke 1:39–45.

Saturday, December 22 A Spirit Rejoicing

In the final countdown to Christmas, some people prepare for a loved one's homecoming. Ordinary chores like grocery shopping, cleaning, and making beds all take on heightened excitement. Mary's *Magnificat* has the same tone of joyous anticipation, coloring all that we do. Today, join your prayer to Mary's: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Today's Readings: 1 Samuel 1:24–28; Responsorial Psalm: 1 Samuel 2:1, 4–5, 6–7, 8abcd (see 1a); Luke 1:46–56.



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Keeping the Seasons

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