

## Sermon Advent 3, December 15, 2024

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene  
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[Zephaniah 3:14-20](#)

[Canticle 9](#)

[Philippians 4:4-7](#)

[Luke 3:7-18](#)

I feel joy deep in my bones. When I hear the word rejoice, I feel my soul shake. It is my **soul** that feels peace and the explosion of love all at the same time. That's **Joy**.

This is the third Sunday in Advent - Joy rings out on this Sunday. This third Sunday of the season often referred to as Gaudete (Gowdeta) Sunday lets us exhale, to feel the joy of what is to come - the joy of Mary - the joy of Jesus - the joy of the good news!

Gaudete (Gowdeta) is a Latin word meaning rejoice! Though all of Advent is a time of deep reflection we pause here, even take a deep breath, we search for the joy as a way to take the pulse of our soul.

I look out on this world on this day and am hard pressed to feel joyous. And then I remember that it might be that I'm looking in the wrong place.

This third Sunday is also attributed to Mary and the rose candle signifies our love and respect for the young virgin mother who boldly steps into a revolutionary moment. We may remember Mary as meek and mild, holy, chosen for the most sacred - certainly history paints her this way.

All that is true **and** I would offer that Mary's story is also about radical transformation. As we focus on the joy today we can allow ourselves to resonate with the radical breaking through, the chance for peace. There is great risk in this word 'yes' for Mary. And though she may feel deep resonating Joy it is no doubt accompanied by fear. Here we have not only the beauty we behold in Mary but the flesh and bones consequences of her decision. She is willing to take great risk. And the result....God shows up in love that transforms, that casts out fear.

This week in our readings we rely on prophetic voice to shape our understanding of Joy.

We heard from Zephaniah a minor prophet of the Hebrew bible, Isaiah, the text of our canticle, and Paul in his letter to the nation of Philippi. If we were to extend the readings particularly those of the Old Testament, we would hear the fear of the people of Israel and each prophetic voice recommending right relationship with God as remedy for that fear. In our words here today, we hear a call to rejoice.

In these few words of New Testament Paul has a gentler approach. (I know, strange right?) I cannot help but be drawn to the feeling of peace that seems the core of joy here. Paul points us toward a peace that surpasses all understanding, the love and protection of Christ Jesus.

Each prophetic voice calls us to rejoice - that though we may fear - God shows up in love that transforms. The prophets point us toward Bethlehem - where we will find God's transformative love.

In our Gospel we hear the voice of John the Baptist, a prophet from the time he leapt in his mother's womb. Luke's gospel lays out for us a scene that is quite colorful, some might say harsh. Right away we know that in the crowd to be baptized are those that appose Jesus and are somewhat desperate. John

does not mix words and his direct words not only startle us but certainly startles the deceitful among the crowd that day.

Immediately rulers, tax collectors and even Roman soldiers are asking what do we do, how do we fix this? They are at the water's edge to be baptized and still they listen carefully to John. John provides concrete answers that point to how we love.

He urges the crowd, and he urges us to show up in that same transformative love of God. He then proclaims the coming of Jesus, the one who will baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. Though the people that day carried fear to that place they are met with news of transformative love. John does not send these vipers away. He offers them truth. He readies them for baptism, the moment of acknowledgement that they are loved and that they are beloved children of God. His approach may seem radical. It is also a moment a great of joy.

This passage is often called a message of redemption, and it does call us to ask the same question the crowd asks that day, what shall we do? How do we live in right relationship with God?

I have read and prayed this passage many times in the last few weeks and when I would close my eyes I would have images come to mind of my time spent at the El Paso border this summer, five weeks spent traveling, meeting people awaiting passage. Sorting clothes and preparing meals with people we call immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers.

I know little to no Spanish and yet I know their stories, I could hear their pain. I could see and feel their fear. I also shared their joy.

They had made it to the border, I saw joy in their eyes. We shared meals and played games with the children. We worked on permits and paperwork, fumbled through language with frustration and even laughter. What I saw in that place was people working hard for people, giving what they could for the safety of another. In those traveling I saw resilience, strength and together we experienced transformative love. I could take a deep, deep breath and feel joy.

So as we ask the question of ourselves - what shall we do? John responds with very concrete direction: Share what you have, clothing and food. This will bring joy. Be mindful of what you truly need, do not take in excess just because you have the power and privilege to do so. This will bring joy.

The ask is to carry God's love in ways that can transform the world. This is an invitation into a life in Christ, an invitation into Baptism.

And all are welcome. Rulers, tax collector even Roman soldiers. You and me and those working for the freedom of others and those traveling to safety. So with this in mind, who might we invite? Where and how might we proclaim the same message: A messiah is coming and he will baptize with a spirit on fire that will transform.

In this world that sometimes scares us we can carry deep within our soul an incarnate joy just as Mary carries a savior delivering a whole new way for this world.

Today we rejoice! With the presence of Jesus, the world will never be the same. May it be so.