

The Third Sunday in Advent

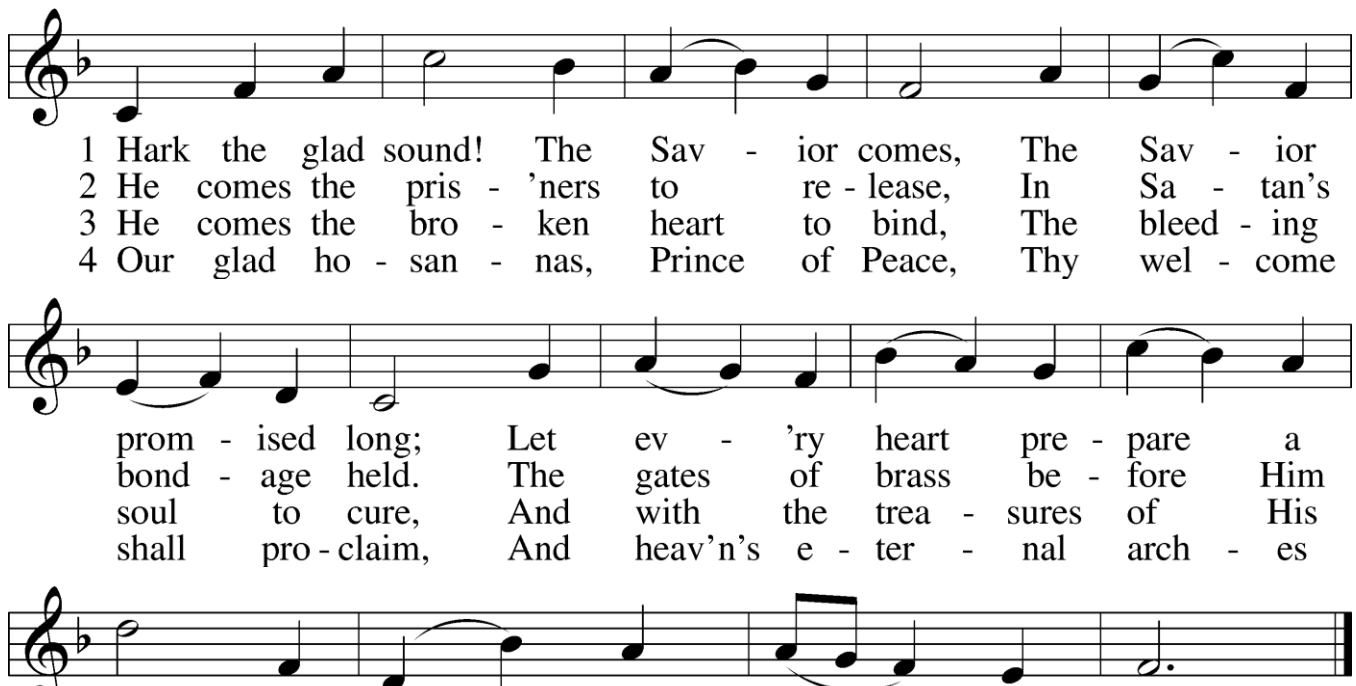
Gaudete!

December 12, 2021

Note: In preparation for this service, you may choose to use an Advent wreath. The Advent wreath has four candles around its circumference. Three of them are blue or purple. One is rose-colored. A white candle is in the middle of the wreath. On the Third Sunday in Advent, we light the blue candle directly across from the rose candle, the blue candle clockwise from the first candle, and the rose candle. You may choose to light it now or in the service where indicated.

The Third Sunday of Advent is a Sunday of rejoicing! *Gaudete* is the Latin name for this Sunday. It means “rejoice!” The third candle on the Advent wreath is traditionally pink or rose color to symbolize the joy that comes with the knowledge that we are about to celebrate Christ’s birth. The historic introit for today begins with the words of Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord, Always.” The rose candle reminds us of “The Rose of Sharon” (Song of Solomon 2:1) that is one of the names of Christ.

Hark the Glad Sound Lutheran Service Book 349, Lutheran Worship 29, The Lutheran Hymnal 66



1 Hark the glad sound! The Sav - ior comes, The Sav - ior
2 He comes the pris - 'ners 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 - 'ry heart pre - pare a
bond - age held. The gates of brass be - fore Him
soul to cure, And with the trea - sures of His
shall pro - claim, And heav'n's e - ter - nal arch - es

throne And ev - 'ry voice a song.
burst, The i - ron fet - ters yield.
grace To en - rich the hum - ble poor.
ring With Thy be - lov - ed name.

L In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C who made heaven and earth. (*Psalm 124:8*)

L Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

C Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. (*Psalm 19:12, 13*)

L If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand?

C But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. (*Psalm 130:3–4*)

L Let us, confess before God that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and as His people let us take refuge in His infinite mercy seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, saying:

C God, be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

(*Luke 18:13*)

L Almighty God, merciful Father, in Your holy Church, You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH - THE THIRD CANDLE:

L As we light the third candle on our Advent wreath, we rejoice that God chose to send forth His only-begotten Son to become fully man. He was born of the virgin and under the Law to redeem us so that we may receive adoption into the family of God through faith. May the Lord use this Advent time to lighten the burdens of our hearts as we prepare for Jesus, the Light of the World, to come as the baby born in Bethlehem.

C O peaceful hearts and happy homes
To whom the King in triumph comes!
The brightest light of joy is He
Who comes to set His people free.
May we to Jesus raise
Our happy shouts of praise.

Introit Psalm 146:5–8; antiphon Philippians 4:4

L Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.

C Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord his God,

L who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;

C who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.

L The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

C Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

L Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.

Kyrie

- L** O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.
L O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.
L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

Collect of the Day

- L** Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C Amen.

Zephaniah 3:14-20

- ¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments
against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil.
¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
“Fear not, O Zion;
let not your hands grow weak.
¹⁷The LORD your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;

- he will exult over you with loud singing.
¹⁸I will gather those of you who mourn for the
festival,
so that you will no longer suffer reproach.
¹⁹Behold, at that time I will deal
with all your oppressors.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
²⁰At that time I will bring you in,
at the time when I gather you together;
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.

- L** This is the Word of the Lord.
C Thanks be to God.

Gradual Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26, alt.

- L** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.
C Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.
L Behold, your king is coming to you;
C righteous and having salvation.
L Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
C From the house of the Lord we bless you.

Psalm 85

- L** ¹LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
C ²You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin.
L ³You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.
C ⁴Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us!
L ⁵Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
C ⁶Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?
L ⁷Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.

- C** ⁸Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.
- L** ⁹Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.
- C** ¹⁰**Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.**
- L** ¹¹Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.
- C** ¹²**Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.**
- L** ¹³Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.

Philippians 4:4–7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- L** This is the Word of the Lord.
- C** Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
- C** Alleluia, Alleluia. who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Luke 7:18–28

- L** The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 7th chapter.
- C** Glory to You, O Lord.

¹⁸The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ²⁰And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” ²¹In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. ²²And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. ²³And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

²⁴When John’s messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts. ²⁶What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷This is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.”

²⁸I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

- L** This is the Gospel of the Lord.
- C** Praise to You, O Christ.

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven

and sits at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty.

From thence He will come to judge the living
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding Lutheran Service Book 345, Lutheran Worship 18, The Lutheran Hymnal 60



1 Hark! A thrill - ing voice is sound - ing! "Christ is
2 Star - tled at the sol - emn warn - ing, Let the
3 See, the Lamb, so long ex - pect - ed, Comes with
4 So, when next He comes in glo - ry And the
5 Hon - or, glo - ry, might, do - min - ion To the



near," we hear it say. "Cast a - way the
earth - bound soul a - rise; Christ, its sun, all
par - don down from heav'n. Let us haste, with
world is wrapped in fear, He will shield us
Fa - ther and the Son With the ev - er -



works of dark - ness, All you chil - dren of the day!"
sloth dis - pel - ling, Shines up - on the morn - ing skies.
tears of sor - row, One and all, to be for - giv'n;
with His mer - cy And with words of love draw near.
liv - ing Spir - it While e - ter - nal a - ges run!

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Devotional Thoughts:

What kind of Jesus do you want? That sounds like an odd question. Is it possible to change Jesus to suit our own personal desires and needs?

It's human nature to want things "My Way." Just ask Frank Sinatra. It can even be tempting for church leaders to try to remake Jesus and Christianity to suit their personal desires.

In Jesus' day, things weren't much different. Some people wanted a Jesus who would change the political structure of the Holy Land and drive out the Romans (Acts 1:6). Others wanted a Jesus who would fill all their

economic dreams (John 6:15). Some wanted a Jesus who would call down fire from heaven (Luke 9:54). But Jesus would have none of it.

In our Gospel lesson for this week, John the Baptist sent his messengers to Jesus with this question, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” The Scriptures do not reveal John’s motivation for asking this question. However, it seems that Jesus is not meeting their expectations. He’s not the Jesus of wrath that they may have anticipated (Luke 3:7).

Who is the real Jesus? He is the Jesus of compassion. Because He had compassion instead of wrath, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

As we continue to read this chapter, Luke reports one of the most memorable events from Jesus’ ministry. A woman who was a known sinner brought an alabaster flask of ointment to a dinner in the house of a Pharisee. Jesus was there. She stood behind Him at His feet, weeping. She began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Simon, the Pharisee, was offended that Jesus would allow this sinful woman to touch Him. He was not being the kind of Jesus that this Pharisee wanted.

This prompted Jesus to explain the situation to Simon through a story of two debtors who could not repay their loans. One owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty. Both had their debts canceled. Jesus then asked Simon, “Which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt.”

Jesus then recalled that Simon, the Pharisee, had not shown Him even the ordinary hospitality granted to guests in a home. But this woman had shown Him extraordinary graciousness. He declared that her sins, which are many, were forgiven. That is why she treated Him in such a loving way. Jesus then said, “But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

Jesus concluded by telling this woman, “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

What kind of Jesus do you want? Just like days gone by, many of us want to remake Jesus into someone who is quick to do things “my way.” We want a Jesus to change the politics of our nation. We want a Jesus who approves of our immorality. We want a Jesus who will give us wealth and prosperity. We want a Jesus who will condemn our foes.

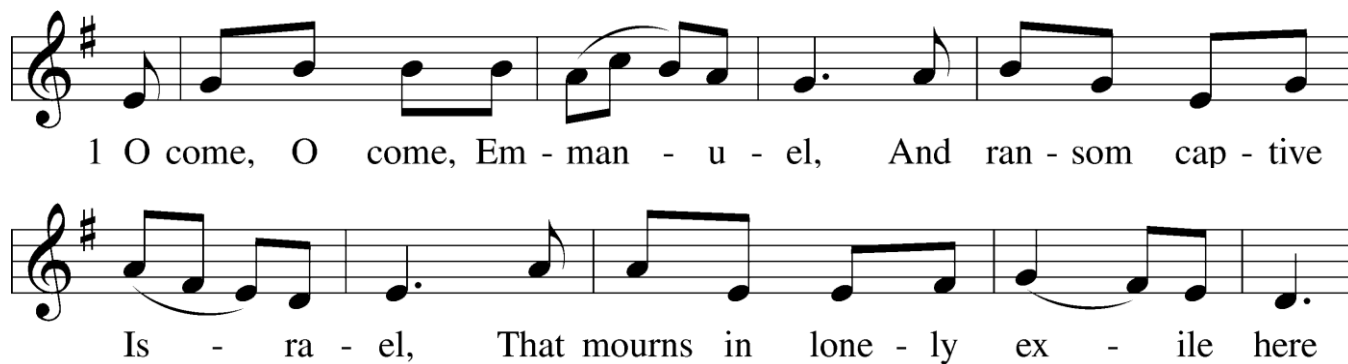
But we have a Jesus of the cross. We have a Jesus who calls us to repentance and in compassion forgives us for our sins. We have a Jesus who brings good news to the poor in spirit.

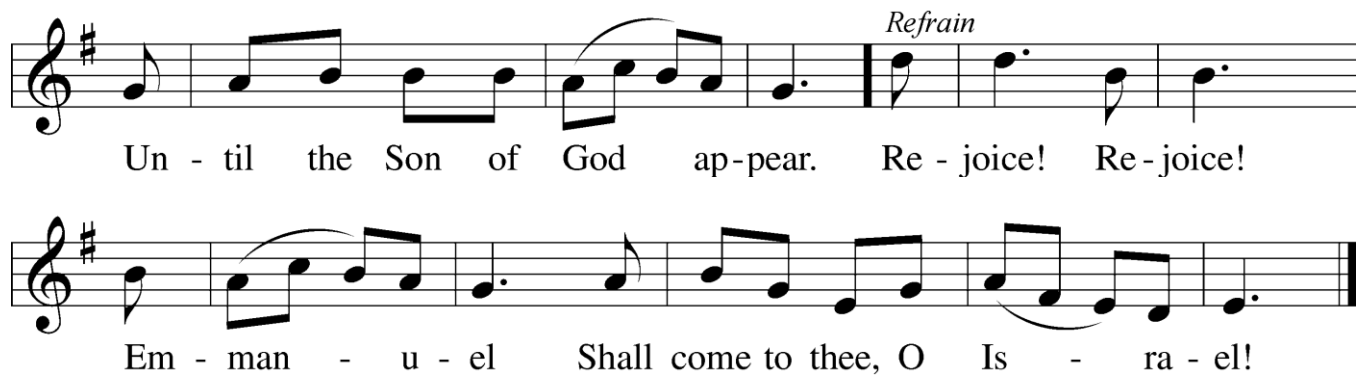
Today, we rejoice in Jesus’ mercy and compassion. We rejoice that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (1 Timothy 1:15).

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:4-7).

God’s richest blessings to you in Christ.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel Lutheran Service Book 357, Lutheran Worship 31, The Lutheran Hymnal 62
Stanza 1





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- L** Heavenly Father, we live in dark times. We are often weighed down by the evil around us and the sin in our lives. Grant that we would turn to You in repentance and rejoice in our savior and the forgiveness that He grants to us.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, keep us from anxious thoughts. Daily move us to come to you in prayer and supplication that we may have peace in our hearts and rejoice in Your love and mercy.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, we ask You to heal the blindness of our hearts that we may rejoice in seeing the truth of Your word and the love that is ours in Jesus.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, we pray for those who have not yet heard or believed in Jesus, Your Son. Grant us the wisdom and skill to preach good news to the poor in spirit that they may rejoice with us before Your throne for all eternity.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, many in our world ridicule Jesus and those who trust in Him. Grant that we would never be counted among those who are offended by Jesus. Strengthen our faith that we may stand firm until the day He calls us to be with Him.
- C** Amen.
- L** Almighty God, send Your holy angels to watch over all of our loved ones, especially those who live in distant places. We thank You for the protection granted to all who have attended to our needs during the pandemic. As we again experience an increase in infections, we ask for Your continued protection and grace.
- C** Amen.
- C** I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.
- C** 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.

L Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

L The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

G Amen.

In Thee Is Gladness Lutheran Service Book 818, Lutheran Worship 442, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a

1 In Thee is glad - ness A - mid all sad - ness, Je - sus,
2 Since He is ours, _____ We fear no pow - ers, Not of
sun - shine of my heart. By Thee are giv - en The gifts of
earth nor sin nor death. He sees and bless - es In worst dis -
heav - en, Thou the true Re - deem - er art. Our souls Thou
tress - es; He can change them with a breath. Where-fore the
wak - est, Our bonds Thou break - est; Who trusts Thee sure - ly Has built se -
sto - ry Tell of His glo - ry With hearts and voic - es; All heav'n re -
cure - ly; He stands for - ev - er: Al - le - lu - ia! Our hearts are
joic - es In Him for - ev - er: Al - le - lu - ia! We shout for
pin - ing To see Thy shin - ing, Dy - ing or liv - ing
glad - ness, Tri - umph o'er sad - ness, Love Him and praise Him
To Thee are cleav - ing; Naught can us sev - er: Al - le - lu - ia!
And still shall raise Him Glad hymns for - ev - er: Al - le - lu - ia!

The chief and leading theme of all the prophets is their aim to keep the people in eager anticipation of the coming Christ... Likewise in our time, too, whatever we teach and establish in the church, we do with a view to getting the people to await the coming of the Savior. Here we must not act in an ungodly manner, but we must live sober, upright, and godly lives (Titus 1:8; 2:12), not, however, as if we always had to stay here (“for here we have no lasting city” [Heb. 13:14] but through Christ we should await another life to come after this life).

Martin Luther, Preface to Isaiah

Service Notes:

One person may serve as Leader or this may be shared with a number of individuals.

Read one or more of the lessons. Hymns may be sung or read. Use as much or little of this service as you would like.

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Enhancing Your Worship

Meditating on God's Word and Works

I will meditate on your wondrous works. Psalm 119:27
My eyes are awake through the night watches,
That I may meditate on Your word. Psalm 119:148 NKJV

The Third Sunday in Advent

December 13 – December 18, 2021

Introduction

Most modern forms of mediation turn a person inward. Biblical meditation turns a person outward toward what God has said and done especially what He has said and done through Jesus for our salvation.

Each Sunday has its own special theme directing us to meditate on God's word and actions. This theme is found in the Propers of the Day (the parts of the service that change week to week). From Advent through the Easter season these themes focus our attention on the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. There is always much more in the propers than can be covered in any Sunday service. God willing, I will use the propers for Sunday to provide you with a devotion each day to help you meditate on what God has done for you.

Monday – St. Lucia Day

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
- C** Alleluia, Alleluia. who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Introit Psalm 146:5–8; antiphon Philippians 4:4

- L** Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.
- C** **Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord his God,**
- L** who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;
- C** **who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.**
- L** The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.
- C** **Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**
- L** Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.

Kyrie

L	O Lord,	C	Have Mercy on us.
L	O Christ,	C	Have Mercy on us.
L	O Lord,	C	Have Mercy on us.

South of Sawyer, Michigan is a small section of road titled, “Old M 11.” M 11 was the original route from southern to northern Michigan, from New Buffalo to Mackinaw City. It was established in 1919. From southwest Michigan, where I live, it was the route into Chicago. By 1926, it became US 12. Today, our portion of M 11/ US 12 has been replaced by Interstate 94.

I have always had a fascination with M 11. My dad often told me stories about my grandfather driving truckloads of fruit into Chicago on M 11. This route originally had many 90 degree turns with stop signs. Eventually, the corners were rounded so that truckers and motorists would not have to stop on their trips into Chicago. My dad said that his father loved the improvement.

M 11 is long gone but for most of my life, you could trace the route by following those rounded intersections. Some years ago, the rounded intersections were removed. All that remains today is one small section of road marked “Old M 11.”

M 11 came to mind as I was thinking about Advent and *Gaudete* Sunday. We still observe Advent. Some people remember *Gaudete* as the name for this Sunday but much of what was Advent has disappeared.

No one is sure when Christians started to observe Advent. However, we do know that it has been part of the Church Year since A.D. 480. It was originally 40 days long, just as Lent is 40 days long. It included repentance and fasting.

Eventually, it was shortened to four Sundays before Christmas. Fasting disappeared. Blue replaced purple as the color for altar paraments. Hope replaced repentance as the primary theme.

But *Gaudete* Sunday remains. In the days, when fasting and repentance dominated, a day of rejoicing was a welcome relief from the somberness of Advent. Today, *Gaudete* Sunday is like the “Old M 11” sign. It is a reminder of an earlier time.

Nevertheless, rejoicing is as appropriate today as it ever was. St. Paul writes to the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). Rejoice in Latin is *Gaudete*.

Paul isn’t suggesting that we may want to rejoice. Rather, grammatically, rejoice is an imperative! It is something that we are bound to do. No, don’t just rejoice. Rejoice, ALWAYS! And this rejoicing isn’t simply for the mundane joys of life. This is rejoicing IN THE LORD! We live in the time when the Savior has come. Sins are forgiven. There never is a time when we aren’t rejoicing in the Lord for the gift of our savior, life, and salvation.

Gaudete! “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice!”

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, there are many times when the cares of life weigh us down. Grant that we would always rejoice in the Lord for the gift of salvation. Amen.

Tuesday

L	In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C	Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

L	Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
C	Alleluia, Alleluia. who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L	O Lord,	C	Have Mercy on us.
L	O Christ,	C	Have Mercy on us.
L	O Lord,	C	Have Mercy on us.

- L** Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** Amen.

The collect for this week is the only one in Advent that doesn't begin with the words, "Stir, up." Instead, we are pleading for Jesus to hear our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts.

Of course, Jesus always hears our prayers. However, our collect recognizes that in our sinful condition, we don't always understand this. We often think that we are abandoned and alone.

Some will experience this more acutely when they see the merriment of Christmas in the people around them. If our hearts are filled with grief, anxiety, or pain then our sorrow is magnified by feelings of being abandoned by God in this season of rejoicing.

But all is not lost. God lightens the darkness of our hearts.

God visited Mary through His messenger, Gabriel. He brought word that she would bear a son who would be the long-promised savior. Her role in God's plan of salvation caused Mary to exclaim, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47).

Advent and Christmas are times to be reminded that Jesus still comes to us today through word and sacraments. He comes to us with grace and mercy. We receive Him by faith.

He lightens the darkness of our hearts through the forgiveness that He won for us on the cross. He has promised to be with us always (Matthew 28:20). After all, that's who He is, "God with us," Immanuel! (Matthew 1:23).

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
- C** Alleluia, Alleluia. who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Psalms 85

- L** ¹LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- C** ²You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin.
- L** ³You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.
- C** ⁴Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us!
- L** ⁵Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
- C** ⁶Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?
- L** ⁷Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.
- C** ⁸Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.
- L** ⁹Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.
- C** ¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

- L** ¹¹Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.
C ¹²**Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.**
L ¹³Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.

Kyrie

- L** O Lord, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**
L O Christ, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**
L O Lord, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**

Psalm 85 is a psalm of sin and grace. Ancient Israel repeatedly abandoned their faithful God. God sent prophets to call them to repentance. The people were deaf to these calls so God allowed judgment to fall upon them. Finally, in distress, the people returned to God and He granted them forgiveness.

Psalm 85 recalls this history and now begs once again for God to restore His people. The psalmist pleads, “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? (verse 6).

Advent is a time for us to reflect on our faithfulness to God. In what ways have we abandoned Him in this past year? Because of our sinfulness, we deserve nothing but God’s anger and punishment. But in Christ, God forgives our iniquity and covers all our sins.

Proof of this is found in the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. Proof of this is found in Jesus’ words from the cross, “Father, forgive them.” Proof of this is found in the resurrection. Proof of this is found in baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the proclamation of the Gospel: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Prayer: O Lord, allow us to rightly reflect on sin in our lives. Move us to come to You in repentance to receive Your steadfast love and grant us Your salvation. Revive us again that we may rejoice in You through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C **Amen.**

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
C **Alleluia, Alleluia. who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.**

Kyrie

- L** O Lord, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**
L O Christ, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**
L O Lord, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**

Zephaniah 3:14-20

¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!

¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments
against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.

The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil.

¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
“Fear not, O Zion;

let not your hands grow weak.

¹⁷The LORD your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;

he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.

¹⁸I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,

so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

¹⁹Behold, at that time I will deal
with all your oppressors.

And I will save the lame

and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.

²⁰At that time I will bring you in,

at the time when I gather you together;

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.

When Christmas is over and the tree is down, where do you store your decorations for next year? In the attic? In the basement? In the garage? Under the stairs? In a hall closet?

When all the ornaments are safely packed away, we forget about them until Christmas comes around again. Then once more, we delight in the beloved memory of Christmas past when a decoration magically springs from the bottom of its long-forgotten resting place. Sometimes it may have been years since you last saw this Christmas treasure.

The Prophet Zephaniah is like that. He doesn't often make it into Christmas pageants or Peanuts specials. He isn't Frosty or Rudolph. He's not Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol or the Night Before Christmas. But he has something wonderful for us to remember during this Advent/Christmas season.

Zephaniah 1:1 tells us, "The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah ... in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah." These were dark times. God's holy temple in Jerusalem had been given over to the worship of idols. The Book of God's Law had been lost.

Josiah became king when He was only 8 years old. For the first years of his reign, he perpetuated the wicked ways of his ancestors. Zephaniah was compelled to prophesy God's judgment upon Judah for its sinfulness.

Then a miracle started to happen. In the eighth year of his reign, Josiah began to seek the God of David and in the twelfth year, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of idolatrous worship (2 Chronicles 34:3).

In the eighteenth year, something even more wonderful happened. Josiah ordered a renovation of the temple in Jerusalem. In the process, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given through Moses! (2 Chronicles 34:14). This rediscovery of God's word was more exciting and valuable than any re-found Christmas ornament. Josiah took God's word to heart. He became known as the foremost among all the kings of the line of David for unswerving loyalty to the Lord!

Zephaniah was able to end his book with an incredible description of what it would be like when God would ultimately restore His people through the savior. We live in the time when Jesus has come. Zephaniah is not Isaiah or Micah, but he gives us remarkable words to hear again at Advent/Christmas time: "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;

I can almost hear Josiah rejoicing in His restoration and forgiveness. We have much more reason to "Sing aloud" because of our salvation!

Prayer: O Lord, thank You that You have preserved Your word among us. Grant that we would again rejoice and exult with all our hearts at the gift of our savior. Amen.

Friday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

L Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord,	C Have Mercy on us.
L O Christ,	C Have Mercy on us.
L O Lord,	C Have Mercy on us.

Philippians 4:4–7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

As you may have guessed, this is one of my favorite Bible passages. It is well known to many people.

When I was young, we attended church every Sunday and every Sunday the pastor ended his sermon with the words of Philippians 4:7, known as the *Votum*.

The Lutheran Hymnal states, *The sermon ended, the Congregation shall rise, and the Minister shall say:*

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

In the dark ages of my youth, the liturgy wasn't as elastic as it is today. In seminary, we learned the difference between "shall rubrics" and "may rubrics." Rubrics are the directions given to the pastor and congregation for conducting the liturgy. The word "rubric" comes from the color red. In liturgy books, directions were written in the color red to distinguish them from the words that were to be spoken or sung.

(As an aside, it was interesting to me that educators have in recent years chosen to adopt this liturgical word to describe the rules that they follow.)

"May" rubrics were optional. "Shall" rubrics were mandatory. Therefore, it was required that the pastor say, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Indeed, God's peace does surpass all understanding. God's peace is grace and grace does not make sense to the human mind. It is only understandable when God's love is made real to us in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Some years later, I learned that these words were contained in the Bible passage that is our Epistle lesson for this week. This is a wonderful passage that connects rejoicing with prayer and supplication, thanksgiving and peace.

All of this is true because the Lord is at hand! We have peace because there never is a time when the Lord is not with us. We rejoice because there never is a time when the Lord is not by our side.

We might have peace and joy because God is an awesome and powerful God. But in reality, that doesn't bring me peace. We have peace because the babe born in Bethlehem went to the cross to save me and all of humanity. This is peace that surpasses all understanding! I cannot help but rejoice!

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for Your presence in my life. Grant me the peace and joy of knowing the salvation that is mine in Christ Jesus our Lord Amen.

Saturday

- L** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

Gradual Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26, alt.

- L** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.
C Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.
L Behold, your king is coming to you;
C righteous and having salvation.
L Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
C From the house of the Lord we bless you.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Kyrie

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| L O Lord, | C Have Mercy on us. |
| L O Christ, | C Have Mercy on us. |
| L O Lord, | C Have Mercy on us. |

Zephaniah 3:14-17

- ¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil.
¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
“Fear not, O Zion;
let not your hands grow weak.
¹⁷The LORD your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.

Let's take one more look at these words from Zephaniah, the first half of our Old Testament lesson. Note that the King of Israel mentioned in verse 15 is not an ordinary king. This King of Israel is the LORD! Because it is the LORD who is our king, we will never again fear evil.

Yesterday, we considered Philippians 4:4-7. In verses 5b-6a, Paul says, “The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything.” He is essentially echoing the thoughts expressed by Zephaniah.

Think about fear and anxiety for a moment. We have fear and anxiety when we anticipate entering a dangerous situation where we have no control.

Personally, I would have no fear if I were floating down a “lazy river” in a water park. However, I would feel quite different if I were floating towards deadly rapids in a wild river.

I do not have the skill to run the rapids in a river. I do not have the strength to properly paddle my canoe or kayak. I would be lost. But when I feel that I’m in the rapids of life, it is important for me to remember that “The Lord God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Our ultimate salvation is assured. When Jesus declared, “It is finished!” from the cross, He completed everything necessary to open the kingdom of heaven to me and all believers.

We still may experience turmoil and strife here on earth. Our hearts may grow faint. Our souls may weary of the struggle with evil. But in reality, you have no need to fear evil, the LORD is with you, now and always. One day, He will take you to be with Him forever. Rejoice and exult with all your heart.

Prayer: O Lord God, thank You for sending King Jesus to be born in Bethlehem. Graciously remove from us all fear of evil because of His work of salvation and His promise to be with us always. Amen.

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