

ADVENT: WAITING WITH HOPE AND EXPECTATION

Third Sunday of Advent
December 13, 2009

Zephaniah 3:14-20
Isaiah 12:2-6
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:7-18

Sing for Joy!

The third week of Advent focuses on the theme of joy. Yet, as we enter this third week, we are confronted with a gospel text that speaks of judgment. Where is joy to be found in the message we hear?

John the Baptizer exhorts the people to repent and turn to God (Luke 3:7-9). His words are indeed as sharp as an ax, warning his listeners of impending punishment if they do not turn from their sinful ways. “What are we to do, then?” the people ask. We, too, may well ask the same question. John’s response admonishes us to show care and concern for those around us – by sharing our resources, providing food and clothing for those in need, not cheating or lying. “In many different ways John preached the Good News to the people and urged them to change their ways” (Luke 3:18, *GNT*). True repentance is to be demonstrated in a lifestyle that exhibits faithfulness to God and love of neighbor.

The prophet Zephaniah preached in the latter part of the seventh century B.C. The prophetic book that bears his name begins with a message of doom and destruction of Judah because the people worshiped other gods and leaders abused their power (1:8, 9). Yet, the book ends with a song of joy that celebrates an end to punishment (3:15), the restoration of Jerusalem (3:16), and a joyful homecoming (3:20).

While both John and Zephaniah reminded their listeners of God’s punishment, they also preached the Good News of salvation for those who changed their ways. Zephaniah reminds the people of God’s presence in their midst (3:17), a presence that brings salvation. John tells the people of the one who is to come who is much greater than he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). As the messianic forerunner called to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord, John proclaims that “the whole human race will see God’s salvation!” (Luke 3:6, *GNT*).

God’s salvation is for all people. The prophet Isaiah’s hymn of thanksgiving celebrates the salvation that God has accomplished (12:2, 3) and exhorts those who have been saved to tell others about God and “the great things he has done” so that the whole world hears this good news (12:5, *GNT*). The prophet tells us to “give thanks to the LORD” (12:4) and

to sing for joy (12:5) because our “holy God is great, and he lives among his people” (12:6b, *GNT*).

Throughout this Advent season, as we await the coming of our Lord and anticipate the good news of his birth, may our hearts be filled with the hope and peace that “is far beyond human understanding” (Philippians 4:7a, *GNT*). May we remember to rejoice and to “be joyful in [our] union with the Lord” (Philippians 4:4, *GNT*).

Yes, God is in our midst. The Advent season also calls us to look toward the Second Coming of our Lord, which Paul tells us “is coming soon” (Philippians 4:5b, *GNT*). As we await that great day, let us sing for joy with all God’s people as we celebrate “The LORD Our Salvation” (Jeremiah 23:6b, *GNT*). Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Congo (Democratic Republic of) – With thanks to God for the new Ketline New Testament and Kanyok Bible, and that the Kiluba translation is reaching its final stages, and with prayers for the translation of the Old Testament into Alur, Kisongye, Lendu, Ngbandi, Mbandja, and Otetela, and for study Bibles in Swahili-Congo and modern Lingala, and with prayers for the launch of the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program in Swahili and literacy and HIV/AIDS awareness work; **Congo (Brazzaville)** – With thanks to God for the impact of the Lari New Testament, for the new General Secretary, and for the growing interest of the Churches in Bible Society work, and with prayers for work among Roman Catholic audiences and the translation of the New Testament into Kibeembe, and with prayers for peace and political stability in the country; **Central African Republic** – With thanks to God for the completion of the translation of the Old Testament into modern Sango, and with prayers for the printing and launch of the Bible in modern Sango, for literacy work among women, for rural distribution, for the new General Secretary, and that God will grant peace to the country.

Activity Corner: “Waiting for Jesus with a Heart Filled with JOY”

Supplies needed: Bible; Bible Concordance; small notebook or writing paper; pen/pencil.

The theme for the third week of Advent is JOY. Look up the word JOY (or REJOICE) in a Bible Concordance and then look up several Bibles passages that contain the word. How is joy expressed in each passage? Consider keeping an Advent Journal to record your thoughts and reflections. At the end of the week, prepare a prayer that incorporates your thoughts. Share your prayer with members of your household during a time of family devotion.

Throughout the Advent season, gather with members of your household and reflect daily on Christ’s Advent – his coming on Christmas as a baby in Bethlehem, his coming to you each day through the Holy Scriptures and prayer, and his promise to come again at the

close of the age. The Bible readings for Advent remind us to remain alert and faithful as we prepare for and await our Lord's coming. If you are using an Advent Wreath, light the first three candles prior to the Scripture reading for the day.

Sunday	Luke 1:1-25
Monday	Luke 1:26-38
Tuesday	Luke 1:39-56
Wednesday	Luke 1:57-80
Thursday	Philippians 4:4-9
Friday	Isaiah 55:1-13
Saturday	Psalm 126

Conclude each day's reading with prayer and singing the first three verses of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" or one of your favorite Advent carols.