

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT – 15 DECEMBER 2024



COLLECT

O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray,
to attain the joys of so great a salvation
and to celebrate them always
with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

GAUDETE is the Latin word for REJOICE!

This Sunday has traditionally been called 'Gaudete Sunday' because of the first readings in today's liturgy. It is an appropriate theme for this mid-point in the month leading up to Christmas and sometimes the presider will even wear rose-coloured vestments.

We may be caught up in end-of-year events, preparations for Christmas/New Year, or getting ready for our summer holidays. The Scripture for our Sunday Mass encourage us to pause and discover the joy of this time of year in the midst of busyness. In the countdown towards Christmas, don't get too distracted and miss the real spirit of the season. Sunday Mass is an opportunity to stop for a moment.

A reading from the prophet Zephaniah 3:14–18

Shout for joy, daughter of Zion,
Israel, shout aloud!
Rejoice, exult with all your heart,
daughter of Jerusalem!
The Lord has repealed your sentence;
he has driven your enemies away.
The Lord, the king of Israel, is in your midst;
you have no more evil to fear.
When that day comes, word will come to
Jerusalem:
Zion, have no fear,
do not let your hands fall limp.
The Lord your God is in your midst,
a victorious warrior.
He will exult with joy over you,
he will renew you by his love;
he will dance with shouts of joy for you
as on a day of festival.

Responsorial Psalm

Isaiah 12:2–6

R. Cry out with joy and gladness:
for among you is the great and Holy One
of Israel.

Truly, God is my salvation,
I trust, I shall not fear.
For the Lord is my strength, my song,
he became my saviour.
With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation. **R.**

Give thanks to the Lord,
give praise to his name!
make his mighty deeds known to the peoples!
Declare the greatness of his name. **R.**

Sing a psalm to the Lord
for he has done glorious deeds,
make them known to all the earth!
People of Zion, sing and shout for joy
for great in your midst is the Holy One of
Israel. **R.**

First Reading

The prophet Zephaniah seems to have been a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah some six centuries before the birth of Christ. Zephaniah is much less well known and has left a much smaller legacy of writings (a book of three chapters compared with Jeremiah's fifty-two).

Like Jeremiah, much of Zephaniah is made up of Oracles of Doom and Judgement. But at the end, the threat becomes a promise and we discover today's summons to rejoicing.

It is a jubilant canticle from start to finish, pulsing with exuberant energy: 'shout', 'rejoice' and 'exult'... And with good reason. Fresh from victory, the Lord their God dances for them whooping with joy. What an image!

The reader should let the assembly settle before opening with a strong and joyous acclamation. After the first four lines, the reading can be taken rather more soberly, building to a new climax with the victorious Lord who exalts, renews and dances.

Responsorial Psalm

Today's response is not actually one of the psalms but a canticle from the prophet Isaiah. It is a hymn of praise.

The tone of the text is hopeful, optimistic, trusting. There is strength in its structure by the repeated imperatives: 'give thanks', 'give praise', 'make known', 'declare', 'sing', 'shout'. The proclamation of the text should confidently reflect such direct acknowledgement of God's greatness and goodness.

The first verse is more reflective: I trust, I shall not fear. This enables the cantor/reader to present the text with some variation of light and shade.

This text will challenge the reader's use of intonation either to hold a sentence in suspension or to make it quite clear that the text has come to an end. The techniques will be necessary in offering the assembly a long and unfamiliar response in two parts. Hold the phrase in suspension after 'gladness'; bring it to a clear end after 'Israel'.

Likewise, with three verses of unequal length, the reader should use the voice to cue the response at the correct time. It is unhelpful if the people repeat the first part of the response too early, or come in with the response in the middle of a five- or six-line verse.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Philippians

4:4–7

I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

3:10–18

When all the people asked John, 'What must we do?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!'

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

Second Reading

Last week, we read from the beginning of St Paul's letter to the Philippians; this week, we read from closer to the end. Check last week's reading and commentary to give you some context.

It is a powerful testimony to St Paul's faith. Even from prison, he can write that there is no need to worry because the Lord is very near. Readers could try to imagine themselves as Paul who is addressing his beloved brothers and sisters to encourage them and to help them find peace. Readers would proclaim the text with sincerity of heart.

Obviously the reading continues the theme of joy and should be proclaimed with a lightness of spirit. The nearness of the Lord picks up the Advent theme of expectant hope.

The third and final sentence is long and elaborate and needs to be carefully paced.

Gospel

It is interesting to see the pastoral advice that John the Baptist gives to various groups of followers: care for the needy; do not abuse your power. John's ministry was so well received that a feeling of expectancy began to arise in people's hearts. But John is humble and self-effacing before Jesus.

He contrasts his water baptism of repentance with Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire. This will inaugurate a whole new era of purification and transformation. Thus John is the perfect Advent prophet who directs our attention to Christ and who prepares our hearts for an encounter with him.

In responding to this gospel, we can make our own the thrice-repeated question: *What must we do?* How do we prepare to meet the Lord?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Solemn Blessing for Advent

May the almighty and merciful God,
by whose grace we have placed our faith
in the First Coming of his Only Begotten Son
and yearn for his coming again
sanctify us by the radiance of Christ's Advent
and enrich us with his blessing.

Amen.

As we run the race of this present life,
may he make us firm in faith,
joyful in hope and active in charity.

Amen.

So that, rejoicing now with devotion
at the Redeemer's coming in the flesh,
we may be endowed with the rich reward of eternal life
when he comes again in majesty.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Advent, *The Roman Missal* p. 709)

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of the prophet Zephaniah 3:14–18

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
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.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
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;
the Lord, your God, will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (NRSV)

Isaiah 12.2-3, 4bcd, 5-6 (R.6)

R. Cry out with joy and gladness:
for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.

Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation. **R.**

Give thanks to the Lord,
call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted. **R.**

Sing praises to the Lord,
for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst
is the Holy One of Israel. **R.**

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians 4:4–7

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

Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near.

Do not worry about anything,
but in everything let your requests be made known to God
by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the gospel according to Luke 3:10–18

The crowds, who were gathering
to be baptized by John, asked him,
“What should we do?”

In reply John said to them,
“Whoever has two coats must share
with anyone who has none;
and whoever has food must do likewise.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him,
“Teacher, what should we do?”

He said to them,
“Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”

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.”

As the people were filled with expectation,
and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John,
whether he might be the Messiah,

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.
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.”

So, with many other exhortations,
John proclaimed the good news to the people.