



*St. Jude's Church
Stony Hill*

*Our Hope and Expectation
Daily Reflections for Advent & Christmas 2021*

**The Third Sunday of Advent, Year C
12 December 2021**

Stir up Your power and come among us!

The Collect: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let Your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and forever. **Amen.**

Reflection: If ever we needed a visit from the Lord, with all His power and might, it is now!

These are very serious times. The "pestilence" of COVID-19 is still upon us; indeed upon the whole world. Every one of us is suffering. Every aspect of our lives has been touched. The joy we once knew has been stolen from us. Crime and violence are still prominent among us. No one is spared! Even innocent little children have been touched – abducted, hurt, injured, killed. Even as I write this reflection, there is news on the radio about a cult ritual which led to murder and mayhem in a "church" in Montego Bay, Jamaica, last evening. If ever we needed You Lord, to come in all Your might and power, it is now!

Yet, even as we are sorely tempted to throw our hands in the air and give up, we know that God, for whose coming we prepare ourselves, is here with us. It is by His grace and mercy that we are alive. His grace is all sufficient, and when we "turn our eyes upon Jesus and look in His wonderful face", we feel deep within us that He never fails us. He is the great **I AM**, the ever present ONE, and it is because of Him that we find the strength to face each new day.

So yes, Lord, come among us. Come with pardon, healing, love, grace, mercy, comfort, help and deliver us. Help us to discern the power of Your Spirit working in us and in the situations in which we find ourselves.

As we become conscious of Your presence among us, help us to be Your agents of hope, peace, strength, and joy to others.

Meditation: "I will give you a new heart, a new spirit within you, for I will be your strength...Seek my face, and see your God, for I will be your hope (CPWI Hymnal #636 verses 1&2)

Prayer: Come Lord Jesus, with all Your power and might. Come with healing in Your wings.

Help us to be ready to meet and accept You right here, right now. **Amen.**

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Our Hope and Expectation
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Monday of the Third Week of Advent, Year C
13 December 2021

Be glad and rejoice

Reading: Zephaniah 3: 14-20

Scripture: "Be glad and exult with all your heart..." (Zephaniah 3: 14b)

Reflection: Zephaniah is not one of the better-known prophets of the Old Testament. But the book of Zephaniah is an important little book and brings to us the message of a man who faced the reality of his time and brought to bear upon it, God's judgement and God's promise of hope.

The people of God had become comfortable with idolatry and other forms of sin; no longer bothered by things which once seemed abhorrent to them. I can hear them saying, "Everybody does it, so what? It is the way to go!" But Zephaniah, the man of God, had a word for them. They were courting their own destruction. God would not tolerate their hypocrisy. The day of the Lord would come; they would be devastated.

What would Zephaniah say to us today? Have we become comfortable with evil and wrongdoing? Do we care that some of the things we say and do, and the way we live our lives with selfishness and disregard for others seem not to be in keeping with what we have learnt from God, in and through Jesus Christ? I think Zephaniah would call us to book.

But Zephaniah was not a pessimist. He warned Judah that, yes, God would deal with them and their sins, but after that the devastation would be lifted. There was hope. There would be restoration and healing. He envisioned a day when people's hearts would once again turn to God and their shame and disgrace would be lifted from them. Restoration was possible! God's people would once again be glad and rejoice.

That was good news for Judah, and it is good news for us today. No matter what you are going through, or how evil and wicked your circumstances seem to be, trust God. He is ever faithful. He will forgive and restore if we turn to Him in penitence. So let us humble ourselves, rejoice and be glad in Him as we watch and wait for His second coming.

Meditation: Spend some time reading, and seriously thinking through 2 Chronicles 7, verse 14. Rejoice and be glad in our merciful Lord.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for loving, forgiving and restoring us, despite our many faults and failings. We will be glad and rejoice in You. **Amen.**

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Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent, Year C
14 December 2021

Shout aloud and sing for joy

Reading: Isaiah 12: 2-6

Scripture: "Surely God is my salvation, I will trust, and will not be afraid." (Isaiah 12: 2a)

Reflection: Fear, anxiety and worry are unwelcome guests that have taken up residence in many of our hearts and homes over the last two years, since the arrival of COVID-19. How do we handle fear and its "cousins"? How do we cope? Many of us are paralyzed by fear. We confess God, in and through Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Saviour, but when we see what we have to face daily, we wonder where God is. I sometimes feel like that. But, time and again, God's words bring me back to faith in our awesome and wonderful Lord whose strength is made perfect in our weakness. When we are weak, He is there for us.

He was there for Joshua when He gave him the awesome responsibility of leading the unruly children of Israel after the death of Moses. His words to Joshua were, "...be strong and very courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go". (Joshua 1: 9) He was there for the shepherd boy when he faced the Philistine giant Goliath. God's people were afraid! The King of Israel was afraid! David wasn't afraid of the giant who promised to chop him up and feed his flesh to the birds and wild animals. David said, "I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts...for the battle is the Lord's". ((1 Samuel 17: 41-49) Here and now in 2021 the "battle" is still "the Lord's". It does not matter what giants you have to face – disease, scammers, kidnappers, murderers or criminals. Our God still says, "Trust me! I will not fail you. I will not forsake you". Our Bible passage reminds us that God is our salvation, our strength, our might. We must trust Him. Instead of cowering and giving up, we must shout and sing for joy! The battle is the Lord's.

Paul and Silas were beaten, put in prison, fastened to the stock, for their witness to Jesus Christ in Philippi (Acts 16:14). They prayed and sang hymns to God and there was an earthquake that broke down the prison walls. They did not make their escape but witnessed to the jailer who was converted and was baptized together with his whole family. The battle is the Lord's!

I read quite recently a story of a nine year old boy who was abducted from his front yard. During a three-hour ordeal he sang his favourite gospel song, "Every praise" by Hezekiah

Walker. He refused to shut up as they drove around. Eventually the kidnapper let him out of the car unharmed. Who but God? The battle is the Lord's! When fear raises its ugly head let us shout aloud and sing for joy!

Meditation: What do you face today? What decisions do you have to make? Fear not; trust God to be there for you.

Prayer: Dear Lord, my salvation, my strength, my might; I need you. Put a new song of joy in my life. **Amen.**

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Wednesday of the Third Week of Advent, Year C
15 December 2021

Rejoice in the Lord always

Reading: Philippians 4: 4-7

Scripture: "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7).

Reflection: When Paul wrote his letter to the Christians at Philippi, he was in prison, probably in Rome. He seemed to have been very fond of the little church at Philippi for he wrote, not to complain about being in prison, but to thank them for a gift they had sent him, and to encourage them in the faith, to remind them that the Lord is near; and to assure them that even in bad times they could find joy in the Lord, and experience God's peace that surpasses all understanding. It is the sort of letter that should bring hope, joy and peace to every believer today.

I particularly like this version of our reading for today: "Delight yourselves in God, yes, find your joy in Him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord. Don't worry over anything whatever, tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus". ('Letters to young churches' translated by J. B. Philips) How we long for that peace that Paul seems to have discovered despite beatings, dangers of many kinds, imprisonment. Because of the transformation Jesus Christ made in his life, he found peace and so could rejoice, even in the face of martyrdom.

It is interesting that we find the words "joy/rejoice, thirteen times, and the words, "Jesus/Christ Jesus" thirty-three times in this Epistle. It is Paul's way of telling us that it is possible to be joyful, rejoice, and find peace when our hearts and lives are "stayed on God" (Isaiah 26:3) in and through Jesus. May we experience joy and peace as we watch and wait during these days of Advent.

Meditation: Peace isn't the absence of problems. It is the presence of God in the midst of your problems. Real peace isn't something you find. It finds you when you allow Jesus to transform your life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, in these perilous times, as we watch and wait for You, help us find the joy and peace which only You can give. **Amen.**

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Thursday of the Third Week of Advent, Year C
16 December 2021

You will have joy and gladness

Reading: Luke 3: 7-18

Scripture: "His name is John" (Luke 1:63b); "John said...I baptize you with water...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3: 7a, 16)

Reflection: In order to better understand the importance of John the Baptist and his role in preparing people for the coming of the Messiah, we have to look at some of the marvellous things that happened in Luke chapter 1.

Zechariah was a priest in the temple in the days of King Herod. He and his wife Elizabeth were both getting older. They had no children – no son or heir, no one to follow in the footsteps of his father. They must have felt quite disheartened at this, but they were praying people and remained faithful to God. They were "righteous" before God and lived "blamelessly" (1: 6).

God honoured their faithfulness by sending angel Gabriel to Zechariah with a message which totally blew his mind. His wife Elizabeth was going to have a son and he was to be named John. Zachariah's first reaction was terror and a feeling of being overwhelmed. This could never be happening! No, it can't happen! Have we not all, at one time or another been there? We pray, we hope, we long for and when it does happen, we are shocked, and are in disbelief! And sometimes we even take God out of the picture, giving all the praise and glory to ourselves.

But the angel Gabriel had Zechariah under control! He walked him through the message he brought: (a) don't be afraid; (b) God has heard and is answering your prayers; (c) you will have joy and gladness, and (d) your son will have a God-given mission, "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:18).

What tremendous news to take home to Elizabeth! But what if it were not true! Could he really and truly believe that God had come through for them in their old age? Have you ever felt like this when the unexpected and unbelievable seems to be happening to you? Do we sometimes believe that God doesn't really do miracles in our day and age? Thank God for the many who can testify that our God is able!

I want to believe that the angel Gabriel challenged Zechariah to see the invisible, believe the unbelievable, and to receive the impossible. He was mute until that day when that promised gift was given to him and Elizabeth. His name was John, the forerunner of Jesus.

Meditation: What is God's challenge to you today? Do you believe that for God all things are possible? (Matthew 19:26)

Prayer: Father God, send Your Holy Spirit to fan our "little faith" into the assurance of knowing that with You all things are indeed possible in and through Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Come into our lives, our homes, and all our situations and manifest Your mighty power. **Amen.**

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Friday of the Third Week of Advent, Year C
17 December 2021

Bear fruits worthy of repentance

Reading: Luke 3: 7-18

Scripture: "Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire." (Luke 3:9b)

Reflection: God chose John, the son of Zechariah, from before he was conceived, to be the one to prepare the hearts of people for His Son, Jesus Christ. He was the "forerunner" of Jesus. He took his mission very seriously. He did not mince his words. He had no time for pious, holy words, to which people would give intellectual assent, while remaining in their old sinful way of life.

He called for repentance, a radical change of heart and life. Hearts so transformed that the "Lord's way" would find fertile soil and grow in them. He didn't subscribe to the belief that one's ancestry or lineage could guarantee salvation. He called for individual responsibility. It didn't matter to him who you were. You might be the King (Herod), or any other high official. The message was the same for high or low - "Let your repentance be evident as you prepare for the coming of the Lord".

John preached that the decision could not be put off. The time was now! The 'axe' is sharpened and ready to chop down fake fruit trees! He was a man with a mission – an immediate mission! He had no time to joke around and get popular and build a kingdom of his own. His heart and mind were focused on Jesus and His way! O for such a man of God today!

We can learn from him that the way of the Lord isn't paved with selfishness, one-upmanship, or popularity. Neither is it paved with extortion, greed, robbery, and all the other many modern evils that we encounter. It is the way of love and sacrifice. It is the way of a heart and life transformed completely, given to, and directed by Him who is The Way, The Truth, and The Life.

Way back in John's day, people listened and responded. They used the outward sign of water baptism to demonstrate their radical change of heart and life. What about us today?

How do we respond? How deep is our relationship with Him whom John said would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire!

Meditation: What people or institutions would John have a harsh word for today? Can you imagine him outside the House of Parliament, Up Park Camp, the Tax Offices or right at your front door? What would he demand from you?

Prayer: As we watch and wait, change my heart, O God. Help me to be really ready to live Your way. **Amen.**

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Saturday of the Third Week of Advent, Year C
18 December 2021

Joyful, joyful we adore Thee

Hymn: Joyful, joyful we adore Thee (CPWI Hymnal #369)

Reflection: This hymn is not one of our Advent hymns. It doesn't call us to watch and wait, nor to be truly sorry and repent our sins. It calls on us to be joyful, to remember that God has given us a wonderful, beautiful world in which to live and work and become what He wants us to be.

When we look at how we live, what is happening around us, we sometimes tend to forget that God is still in control of His world. We allow the "dark clouds of sin and darkness" to distract us from true faith in God. So, we ask God in the first verse, to "drive the dark of doubt away". As Christians we declare that Christ has come and therefore we celebrate His birth at Christmas. As Christians we firmly believe that Christ will come again, so we joyfully await His coming in glory.

The second verse encourages us to look around us and behold how the beauty, might and power of God are reflected to us in various elements of nature. The author, Henry Van Dyke, thinks of stars and angels singing in "unbroken praise" to Almighty God. He 'hears' our own world – mountains, rivers, forests, birds, calling us to rejoice in God. Yes, there is so much right here, right now that can cause us to rejoice. We don't have to wait for the 'rapture' or the second coming of our Lord. We are called upon to make our joy in the Lord evident in our lives from day to day – even as we watch and wait for Him.

In the third verse, Van Dyke reminds us of the nature of God – giving, forgiving, ever blessing! He reminds us that the joy of living is to be found in God. With Him there is that "well-spring", that "ocean-depth" of "joy", enough to satisfy all those who truly believe and are prepared to walk in His Way. He reminds us of our own relationship with God which should reflect in our relationship with one another. God is our father, Christ is our brother and all who live in love belong to God. He ends this beautiful hymn with a prayer, "Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine".

When I am lonely and depressed, when sickness and pain wrack my body, when news from home and abroad are not too good, this hymn sung to Beethoven's tune 'Ode to Joy', opens

my eyes and lifts my spirit and helps to put the joy back in my life.

Meditation: Read aloud, all the verses of this hymn and listen with your heart. As you go through today make a list of all the things that bring you joy in the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, give me that joy that only You can give, and help me to share it with others.
Amen.

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