

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## **The Third Sunday of Advent—Year C**

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Third Sunday of Advent – Year C

## Reading I

### Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Shout for joy, O daughter Zion!  
Sing joyfully, O Israel!  
Be glad and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter Jerusalem!  
The LORD has removed the judgment against you  
he has turned away your enemies;  
the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst,  
you have no further misfortune to fear.  
On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged!  
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,  
a mighty savior;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness,  
and renew you in his love,  
he will sing joyfully because of you,  
as one sings at festivals.

## Responsorial Psalm

### Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6.

**R. (6) Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.**

God indeed is my savior;  
I am confident and unafraid.  
My strength and my courage is the LORD,  
and he has been my savior.  
With joy you will draw water  
at the fountain of salvation.

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

Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;  
among the nations make known his deeds,  
proclaim how exalted is his name.

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

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement;  
let this be known throughout all the earth.

Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,  
for great in your midst  
is the Holy One of Israel!

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

## **Reading II**

### **Philippians 4:4-7**

Brothers and sisters:  
Rejoice in the Lord always.  
I shall say it again: rejoice!  
Your kindness should be known to all.  
The Lord is near.  
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,  
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,  
make your requests known to God.  
Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding  
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

## **Alleluia**

### **Isaiah 61:1 (cited in Luke 4:18)**

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**  
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring glad tidings to the poor.  
**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

# Gospel

## Luke 3:10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist,  
“What should we do?”  
He said to them in reply,  
“Whoever has two cloaks  
should share with the person who has none.  
And whoever has food should do likewise.”  
Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him,  
“Teacher, what should we do?”  
He answered them,  
“Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.”  
Soldiers also asked him,  
“And what is it that we should do?”  
He told them,  
“Do not practice extortion,  
do not falsely accuse anyone,  
and be satisfied with your wages.”

Now the people were filled with expectation,  
and all were asking in their hearts  
whether John might be the Christ.  
John answered them all, saying,  
“I am baptizing you with water,  
but one mightier than I is coming.  
I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals.  
He will baptize 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 with unquenchable fire.”  
Exhorting them in many other ways,  
he preached good news to the people.

# Exegesis

## Zephaniah 3:14-18a

The ministry of the Prophet Zephaniah took place during the reign of King Josiah. King Josiah was elevated to the throne at eight years of age after the death of his predecessor King Manasseh. “Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He pleased the Lord, following the path of his ancestor David. In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still a youth, he began to seek after the God of his forefather David, and in his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the sacred poles and the carved and molten images.” (2 Cr 34: 1-3). “Thus, he purged Judah and Jerusalem.” (2 Cr 34: 5).

Experts believe that *Zephaniah* was written during the early years of King Josiah. Before the great reformation that took place when Josiah came of age, there was incredible idolatry rampant in Israel and Judah. Manasseh was known as an apostate. Worship of the pagan god Baal was flourishing. In addition, an Assyrian influence introduced the worship of the stars, the sun and the moon. With all of this going on there was considerable political chaos as well. This is the backdrop of *Zephaniah*.

*Zephaniah* is a short work comprised of just three chapters. The first chapter is titled *The Day of the Lord: A Day of Doom*. The second chapter is titled *The Day of the Lord: A Day of Judgment*. Chapter 3 is titled *Reproach and Promise for Jerusalem*.

After doom, judgement and reproach come a promise from Yahweh, the promise of refuge and salvation for a faithful remnant. It is a promise that Yahweh, the King of Israel, the Lord, will be with them, i.e., in their midst. He will be in their midst as a mighty savior. The Lord has removed the judgment against those who turned back to Him.

Our pericope is sometimes referred to as a summons to rejoicing and an oracle of reassurance to Jerusalem. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* cites Isaiah 12:6 (our Psalm this weekend) as the closest parallel passage in Scripture.<sup>1</sup> “Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” Yahweh’s presence “in the midst of” Jerusalem provides defensive rather than offensive help.<sup>2</sup> With Yahweh in their midst they no longer have cause for fear or discouragement, “Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior.” (Ze 3: 16-17).

The scriptural understanding of the phrase *mighty savior* is perhaps best articulated in Psalm 118: 10-18. The power of God is expressed in His protective, saving care. “I was hard pressed and falling, but the Lord came to my help. The Lord, my strength and might, came to me as savior.” (Ps 118: 13:14). Luke uses the expression *mighty savior* in Chapter 1 v. 59 to describe Jesus in the *Canticle of Zecharia*: “He has raised up a mighty savior.” The Greek word that we translate as *mighty* is *keros*, and the Greek word for savior is *soteria*. The New American Bible translates Luke 1:59 as follows: “He has raised up a horn for our salvation. *Keros* is a word that was also used to describe the horn of an animal. The horn was seen as an instrument of power and might. *Soteria* is a word that described deliverance from harm or slavery, or victory over an enemy, i.e. salvation.

It is precisely in the power of God as mighty savior that Zephaniah is summoning the people to rejoice. We rejoice also because in His love for us, God is rejoicing over us: “He will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in His love. He will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals.” (Ze 3: 17-18).

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1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy: *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 257.

2. *Ibid.*



## Exegesis (Continued)

### Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6.

Isaiah Chapter 12 consists of 6 verses. It is titled *Song of Thanksgiving*. This pericope taken from *First Isaiah*, like *Zephaniah*, was written shortly before the destruction of Israel and the Babylonian Exile that followed. This section of Isaiah is full of warnings and promises. Our passage is a Psalm like song full of gratitude and rejoicing in the promise of an expected savior.

Our passage is set up by the prior verse in *Isaiah*: “There shall be a highway for the remnant of His people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when he came up from the land of Egypt.” (Is 11:16). The similarities with of Isaiah 12 and Zephaniah 3 are striking. Both prophets look forward in joy and thanksgiving to a day of salvation. Both speak of a remnant of the people restored. Both look forward to a time when Israel will be set free to return to the Holy City. Both the Exodus and the end of the Exile are symbolic for us of the day of salvation, the coming of the Messiah.

The term *yesua* in Hebrew, *savior* in English appears three times in this short passage. “God indeed is my *savior*; I am confident and unafraid. My strength and my courage is the Lord, and he has been my *savior*. With joy you will draw water at the fountain of *salvation*. (Is 12: 2-3).

*The fountain of salvation* evokes the image of the rock in the desert. As Moses struck the rock in the desert life giving water flowed. St. Paul would later proclaim: “All drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” (1 Cor 10:4). Now we recognize the *fountain of salvation* as the pierced side of Christ on the Cross from which water and blood flowed, and the gifts that flow from the sacraments of His Church.

### Philippians 4:4-7

Philippi was a flourishing town in the Roman province of Macedonia. It is situated on a busy road, the Via Egnatia, linking the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. The city lacked a Jewish synagogue. Although there was a small Jewish community there, Paul’s community was predominantly Gentile. The community was established by Paul during his second missionary journey. It was the first community established in Europe. (See Acts 19:9-40).

After the standard greeting Paul begins: “I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you...” (Ph 1:4). Paul quite often begins with gratitude to God for the faith that he saw in the early church communities, an expression of joy and an exhortation to rejoice. The expression of joy flows throughout the *Letter to the Philippians*, e.g., (1:18, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 28, 29; 3:1; 4: 1, 4, 10).

Our passage is titled simply *Joy and Peace*. Note that Joy and Peace are fruits of the Holy Spirit. God is the source of these human Spiritual experiences.

*The Lord is near*. The Greek word for *near* is *engys*. It is the same word that Jesus used as He began His public ministry: “From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say. ‘Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand (*engys*).’” (Mt 4:17).

As expressed in our first reading and our psalm this weekend, because the Lord is near, at hand, in their midst, there can be no fear or anxiety and there is cause for thanksgiving and rejoicing. The Greek word that we translate as *thanksgiving* is a familiar one, *Eucharistia*.

*Then the peace of God that is beyond all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*. The *peace of God* is a reality that the Hebrew language describes with the word *Shalom*. This is not peace as the world gives, but peace that Jesus brings to earth.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Luke 3:10-18

Our Gospel passage from St. Luke today is a continuation of the account of the preaching of John the Baptist that began at Chapter 3, v 1.

*And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?"* Luke will echo this same question as people responded to the preaching of St. Peter at Pentecost. "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do my brothers?' Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'". (Acts 2: 37-38). The question occurs two additional times in *Acts*. It is asked by the Gentile Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30, and by St. Paul himself on the Damascus road. Both of these responses also lead to repentance and Baptism.

In the synoptic Gospels, verses 10-14 are unique to Luke. Luke tends to emphasize the lost and found motif, e.g. lost sheep, lost son, and the two disciples going the wrong way on the road to Emmaus. Now it is the lost who are coming to John, i.e., tax collectors and sinners, as they would later come to Jesus.

*I am baptizing you with water.* The people at the time would have recalled the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit withing you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees." (Ez 36:25-27).

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* Again, the people of the time would have recalled the above passage from the Prophet Ezekiel relative to God pouring out His Spirit into their hearts. They also would have recalled the passage of the refining fire from the Prophet Malachi: "Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying, and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold and silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord." (Mal 3: 1-3).

From the days of Pentecost, we recognize the Baptism of Spirit and Fire as the event of Pentecost, and the Baptism of Holy Mother Church.

## Reflection

As we move closer to the coming of our Savior at Christmas we are called to look forward with joy. We celebrate this weekend what is referred to as Gaudete (Gau- dae-tae) Sunday. Gaudete is a Latin word that means “rejoice”. We pause from our purple penitential mode and light the pink candle as a sign of our rejoicing and joy. In our readings this weekend the Prophets Zephaniah and Isaiah, and St. Paul are calling us to rejoice because our salvation is near.

At the Last Supper, the beloved disciple John captures some of the most beautiful words of Jesus that we call the Last Supper Discourse. In those beautiful words of Jesus, He talks about the coming of another Advocate, the Holy Spirit. He talks about the indwelling of this Spirit in our hearts and souls. He prayed, “Father may they be one as You and I are one.” He gives us the wonderful metaphor of the Vine and the Branches. He talks about the gift of the sharing of divine life. As He was about to walk out into the Garden of Gethsemani to begin His journey of the Cross, Jesus said: “I tell you this so that My joy may be in you and your joy might be complete.”

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, JOY, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22)

I see a huge disconnect in our world today. The attempt to remove Christ from Christmas is a part of the greater movement to take God out of our lives. “God is closer to us than we are to ourselves,” St. Augustine always said. God is the ground of our being the source of our very life. We can no more take God out of our lives, than a goldfish can take the water out of its bowl. If it could, the results would be the same... death. The visible result of the disconnect from the Holy Spirit is the absence of His fruits, i.e., love, JOY, peace, etc. Some well-respected sociologists are calling our present era perhaps one of saddest times in recorded human history.

In His first letter to the world, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis called everyone to return to rejoicing in God our Savior. The Gospel is GOOD NEWS! And we are called to proclaim that God New with our lives. We are called to herald the God News from the rooftops. Born for us is a Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord!

His body given up for us (white) and His blood poured out for us (red) come together on our Altar. Just as red and white form pink, Jesus is the source of our joy. Come and enter into the mystery of His indwelling life. Become what you receive, the Body of Christ, and rejoice always in God our Savior. He is the joy of our soul.

In Christ,





## Personal Witness

Early in my priesthood I was asked to meet with a young person who was really struggling. This young man was in his early twenties and was struggling with alcohol and drug addictions. His struggles caused him to be expelled from 2 different colleges. At the insistence of his parents, he attempted several recovery programs and ultimately failed each time. He attempted suicide on multiple occasions.

Meeting with a priest was the last thing that he wanted. He did not want to be there. Nonetheless, I prayed hard and gave it my best shot. As I talked to him, he looked sad and distant. I felt a heaviness, and a darkness, that I had never experienced before. Was it the presence of evil? He claimed to be an atheist. When I asked him what gave him passion in life, he could not answer.

That night after the meeting I could not get him out of my mind. As I sat in prayer it occurred to me that what I was experiencing was emptiness. When I observed the darkness of his eyes it was like there was nothing there. I was struck by the fact that what I was seeing was the opposite of what Jesus called the fullness of life. Jesus said, "I came so that you might have life and have life to the fullest." (Jn. 10:10)

It seems to me that the opposite of the abundant life is not death, it is nothingness or emptiness. As I contemplated that dichotomy it occurred to me that the opposite of Joy is not sadness, it is emptiness. Similarly, the opposite of the other fruits of the Holy Spirit, like love and peace is emptiness as well. The opposite of love is apathy, from the Greek word *a pathos*, which literally means no passion, an absence of love. The opposite of peace, *shalom*, is not war or discord, it also is emptiness, an absence of peace.

At the Last Supper, as Jesus promised the gift of His indwelling presence, the gift of the Holy Spirit, he talked about His love, joy, and peace dwelling within us. As He was about to walk into the Garden of Gethsemane He said, "I tell you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy might be complete." (Jn. 15:11) In our first reading this weekend the Prophet Isaiah proclaims, "in my God is the joy of my soul." Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. God is the source of love, and joy and peace.

Sadly, when I look into the eyes of people today, I often see the same emptiness that I saw in that young man 25 years ago. The rate of suicide today is off the charts. It is not just young people who are struggling today, it is an epidemic afflicting all age groups. It seems to be especially affecting people in late middle age. God is what we need! Spread the word... God is what we need!

From my own experience I can say that when I was there years ago, I did not even realize that it was God whom I needed. Something was missing in my life, and I did not know what it was. It was not until I rediscovered that Joy, the Joy of the Holy Spirit, that I realized what I was missing. The greatest gift we can bring to those around us this Christmas season is to lead them to Jesus. Each one of us must do our part to spread the Love, Joy and Peace that Jesus brings to earth. One of the rules of what Bishop Barron calls spiritual physics is this: the more love you give the more love you experience, the more joy you give the more joy you experience, the more peace you bring the more peace you experience. The source is infinite and inexhaustible! It is highly contagious! Love, joy, and peace will spread faster than any virus, and the outcome is better too!

