

December 15, 2024
3rd Sunday of Advent
Luke 3:10-18

The crowds asked John the Baptist, "What then 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 Messiah. 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.

Background:

In Luke's Gospel, John is associated with the Old Testament prophets to prepare for the coming of the messiah. One of the expectations at the time was that a messiah would bring a political transformation. John too looks for a Messiah, one who will come with the Holy Spirit and fire. He will bring judgment and usher in a new age that would be free from Roman domination. This more radical expectation is expressed in the three verses that are omitted from the Lectionary between last week's Gospel and the text for this week.

"He [John] said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our Father," for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." (Luke 3:7-9)

But as Luke continues, John's message is tempered with the political hope of freedom from Rome. The Gospel for the third Sunday of Advent passes over John's harsher words.

Three times the question is asked of John, "What should we do?" John is calling everyone to repentance, a repentance that is demonstrated by a change in how one lives. John does not ask that people join his austere life in the desert, or even ask that they work to end the harsh reality that people lived with daily. He asks them to make changes in their daily life that are possible. Each time John is asked, "What should we do," his response indicates that they should live out their given role in society, being faithful to their responsibilities and considerate of others, but not taking advantage of others.

Luke understands that John's call to prepare for the coming reign of God is addressed to everyone, not just the religious faithful. Luke is making sure his audience is aware that even tax collectors and soldiers were responding to John's call to conversion. The fact that John was instructing them as to how they should live also suggests that their conversion had awakened in them a sincere effort to live differently. The tax collectors of the day were more like toll collectors that would collect a fee as people and goods would pass their post. Often, they were people who could not find other types of work, and they were forced by circumstance into this way of supporting themselves. They collected a fee as people and goods were crossing roads or bridges, or entering the city gates. The soldiers referred to here were likely guards who were assigned to protect the tax collectors. Both were despised because they were aiding an occupying Roman government. But they are included by Luke in his Gospel as coming to John for baptism.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have there been times in your life when you felt a need to make a significant change in the way you lived? What do you remember about that experience? What did you do to express that desire? If that is not your personal experience, have you experienced that sense of transformation in others?
2. In the second part of today's Gospel Luke states, "Now the people were filled with expectation." Do you recall times in your life when you have been filled with expectation? What do you remember of that experience?
3. Can you also recall times when you lived without hope or expectation?
4. Are there people around you who seem to live without expectation? Do you experience hope for them?
5. How are the people in your community offering a sense of hope?
6. If John the Baptist were alive today and you asked him, "What should I do," what do you think he would say?
7. Of all the people who were coming to John for baptism, why would Luke single out soldiers and tax collectors?
8. John seems to know himself, who he is and who he is not. He also asks people to live within the limits of their life. Can you talk to God about your desire to authentically live your life, or some other aspect of your present life that this Gospel touches?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for December 15, 2024, the Third Sunday of Advent

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.

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. Give thanks to the Lord,

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

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!

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.

The crowds asked John the Baptist, "What should we do?" He said 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 gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with fire."

Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

Excerpts from Zephaniah 3:14-18; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; and Luke 3:10-18

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for December 15th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. This Third Sunday of Advent is also called Gaudete Sunday, which translates to "Rejoice." The Gospel, from Luke, picks up from last week's narrative, where John the Baptist was exhorting the people to repent of their sins, in preparation for and anticipation of the coming of the Lord. John responds to various ones who ask, "What should we do," by reminding them of righteous behaviors which would show evidence of their repentance. Then, "the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. He answered them saying, 'One mightier than I is coming.' Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to them."

The other readings have additional references to rejoicing about the nearness and presence of the Lord. In the first reading from Zephaniah, Jerusalem is told, "Shout for joy, O Jerusalem! Be glad and exult with all your heart! The Lord, your God, is in your midst." The responsorial, which is from Isaiah, exclaims, "Shout with exultation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!" In the second reading, from the letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "Rejoice! The Lord is near. Make your requests known to God, and his peace will guard your hearts."

There is another underlying theme in the readings for this Sunday, one rich enough, and valuable enough to rejoice over. "Fear not, O Zion, be not discouraged! The Lord, your God, is in your midst," says Zephaniah. From the responsorial, Isaiah says, "God indeed is my savior; I am confident and unafraid." Paul in Philippians says, "Have no anxiety at all." He adds, "Make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds." And John the Baptist in the Gospel had good news, and an answer for everyone who asked, "What should we do?" "One mightier than I is coming," he said. Zephaniah has even more though. "He will rejoice over you with gladness." This goes farther than the people being told, "Don't be afraid, and rejoice because God is near." This is God rejoicing because his people are near. "He will sing joyfully because of you." Now there is something to rejoice over, and bring the peace of God over you. The peace of God. That surpasses all understanding.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!