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3rd Sunday of Advent - 12 December 2021

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12 December 2021

Third Sunday of Advent

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Introduction

As we prepare to celebrate the coming of the messiah, we are reminded of the qualities of the life of faith. John the Baptist gives them an edge, but it is important for the Christian community to realize that its 'feet are being held to the fire' in our own circumstances. In an echo of the sermon on the plain, the Gospel from Luke is preparing us for the radical teachings of the beatitudes and the sermon that leads on from those blessings: these are set before us as a meaning of Christmas.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you baptise us with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Lord, have mercy.

You guide us when we are despairing.

Christ, have mercy.

You show us the perfect example of love.

Lord, have mercy.

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.*

This third week of the season heralds a turn from an emphasis on the second coming of Christ to the impending feast of Christmas. The collect describes us as awaiting the feast of the Nativity of the Lord. Interestingly the sixth century original was slightly more theological, speaking of our expectation of the 'incarnation' rather than the 'birth'. For contemporary believers three images come to the fore here. The most profound is that of the incarnation: the divine one taking flesh and living as fully human. Following the patristic wisdom of St Irenaeus, 'what is not taken up of our humanity cannot be saved'. The primary unpacking of the incarnation is that the savior must be born to be of one flesh with us. From this flows the prayer's understanding of the 'nativity'. The term seeks to focus our attention on the full humanity of Jesus. However, uppermost in our consciousness today, following the

piety of the medieval period, is the way we immediately equate the nativity with the actual birth of the child Jesus to Mary his mother in a stable in Bethlehem, angels, magi, animals and stars all included. While the birth of a child is always a cause of joy, and a safe birth under such conditions well worth celebrating, the joy that underpins our worship and the rejoicing that can only be defined as solemn is because the divine took flesh and we have been offered salvation.

First Reading

Zephaniah 3: 14-18a

The prophet Zephaniah applies hope to our Advent worship.

Responsorial Psalm

Isaiah 12:2-6. R. v.6

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

The psalm calls us to cry out because God is our salvation, our strength, our song.

Second Reading

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice the Lord is near! The author of the letter to the Philippians wants us to be happy, always happy in the Lord.

Gospel Reading

Luke 3:10-18

John the Baptist preaches the good news to the outcasts while encouraging them to see their expectations fulfilled in the one who is coming.

Reflection

This slightly diverse set of readings are being applied to our Advent piety. We start with the little-known prophet Zephaniah. Our passage is the closing section of the short book. It is a hopeful ending, whereas the rest of the book was more concerned with God's wrath at false worship in Jerusalem. The setting is the tyranny of the great nations jostling for power (Egypt, Assyria, the Sythians) and the people of Israel in their midst making strategic and political alliances but forgetful of what constitutes true worship.

Perhaps a fruitful application for us is around the theme of hope. The prophet ends with hope despite his dire prophecies. In a typical ancient world fashion, the hope is

in a leader to come. Here we have the close application to Advent and the coming of the Lord. We do not live in a 'strong man' society or politic, though strong leadership of a democratic form is prized! However, our hope for the present situation may well be to call upon the gifts we already have in our midst as a church, and to bring these to the fore.

In the scriptures the term 'true worship' has depth and resonance. It is more than appropriate celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments. While including this, and bringing us back to this, it also reflects the integrity of the life of the assembly. They must be true to God – true worship with heart and mind and soul – and true to the reign of God – love of neighbour as self.

The short excerpt from the Letter to the Philippians has a lovely balance. The Advent seasonal centrepiece is Paul's declaration that 'the Lord is near'. For young children, Christmas is a countable number of sleeps away. Yet the author does not place all in the future. The present is to be marked by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving and quieted hearts. This is the age of the good news, and the peace of Christ is already guarding the hearts of the faithful. This active faith is the setting for the hope in the imminent coming of Christ. It is our hope too. Perhaps the sentiment that is most apposite for us comes early in the reading: 'your kindness should be known to all'. The impending coming of Christ as celebrated in Advent, or as understood by Paul to be a coming that was soon to be realized, should not be an excuse for embodying the good news here and now. Our communities should be renowned for their kindness.

The Gospel serves the theme of the season with a further declaration of the 'adventing' of Christ. As we approach the feast of the inbreaking of the light, the Baptist is described as exhorting those who are listening to him to await Jesus. Still John is allowed something of his own flourish. As a prophet of repentance, he has an apocalyptic streak. The Christ will bring both the Holy Spirit and fire. The Spirit may be disruptive enough but further there is a hard cleansing to come, a strong winnowing, a reckoning of sorts. While this does not match the eventual preaching of Jesus, but Luke allows that John too preaches the good news.

In this preaching the Baptist is attractive to those on the outside of religious observance and good piety. Tax collectors, soldiers and other extortionists find hope with John, as do the poor. They are to be fed and clothed. There is much here that will be assumed into the preaching of Jesus.

For our liturgical setting, these characteristics mark who is to come. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of the messiah, we are reminded of the qualities of the life of faith. John gives them an edge, but it is important for the Christian community to realize that its 'feet are being held to the fire' in our own circumstances. In an echo of the sermon on the plain, in this reading Luke is preparing us for the radical teachings of the beatitudes and the sermon that leads on from those blessings. As we await the celebration of the coming of the Good News, we are challenged by our readings and our immersion in the pandemic to ask whether we are good news to those around us. John reached beyond the usual restrictions to touch those considered beyond the bounds of God's love. As we are stretched, how well are we actually stretching to extend the bounds of God's love?

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we await the feast of the Lord's nativity, let us turn to God now with our petitions to guide us in attaining the joys of so great a salvation.

Petitions

We pray for the Pope Francis, and all other Christian leaders that they may be guided by the Holy Spirit in representing Christ as we move towards the Synod of Bishops next year. May the efforts of the members of the Plenary Council continue to bring fruitful discernment for our Church in Australia.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are separated from family and friends due to the pandemic, be comforted with your peace and rest as we move into the Christmas season.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for a rejoicing amongst the hungry and the homeless, and that their stomachs will be filled and a roof put over their heads during this season of Advent.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our own community, that just like John the Baptist, we can point towards Christ in all his power and glory through the work the Lord has called us to do.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all of those who have yet to meet you, Lord, that in leading up to the season of your nativity, they will come to know the Good News.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those suffering ill health in mind and body. May the care and generosity of others enable them to find comfort and solace.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Father, all these prayers are from those who love and rejoice in you. We trust that you hear them and give us peace in understanding you will grant them in unity with your Son, Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

GA

A voice cries out. M. Joncas. 278
My soul in stillness waits. M. Haugen. 280
O come, O come Emmanuel. J. M. Neale et. al./ Gregorian Chant Melody. 285
Prepare the way. B. Boniwell. 284
The Spirit of God. L. Deiss. 185
The voice of God. P. Icarus/ W. Greatorex. 476
Wait for the Lord. Taize. 283.

AOV1

O come, O come Emmanuel. J. M. Neale et. al./ Gregorian Chant Melody. 174

AOV4Kids

Christmas is coming. J. Bell. 55 (Verse 3)
Fill ev'ry valley up. M. Mangan. 54
O Emmanuel. M. Mangan. 52
Rejoice in the Lord always. Traditional. 75

CWB

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry. Charles Coffin/Tr. John Chandler. 780
Rejoice, the Lord is king! Charles Wesley. 799
Take comfort, God's people. Omar Westendorf. 813

CWBII

Sunday by Sunday hymn suggestions
Hark! a herald voice is calling. Tr. Edward Caswall. 239
Prepare the way, O Zion. Mikael Franzén, tr. Charles P. Price. 245
Wait for the Lord. Taizé Community. 251
Additional selection by Chris deSilva
In the Lord I'll be ever thankful. Taizé Community. 522

S&S2

Cry out with joy. Joshua Blakesley. 289

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Isaiah 12: *Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel.*

Isaiah 12: Kathleen Boschetti MSC. CWB 180

Isaiah 12: Jenny O'Brien. JOBC pg. 10

Cry out with joy and gladness. LPC Marty Haugen. pg.11

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Fill every valley (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]
O Emmanuel (TT/SYJ/CWB II) [Gathering, Communion, Recessional]
Come, Lord Jesus, come CH & V3 (SYJ/ CWBII) [Lighting Advent Wreath]
We come, we come (TWB) [Communion – esp V3]
One body in Christ (TWB) [Communion – esp V2]
Waiting for the child (TT/SYJ) [Non-Scriptural Reflection - Gifts]