

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 12.13.15 Advent 3c*

Day One: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion!

Shout in triumph, O Israel!

*Rejoice and exult with all your
heart,*

O daughter of Jerusalem!

*The LORD has taken away His
judgments against you,*

He has cleared away your enemies.

*The King of Israel, the LORD, is
in your midst;*

You will fear disaster no more.

We don't "shout for joy" a lot in church, do we? Is it because we're not joyful? I don't think so.

It could be shyness, or just the idea that shouting is more appropriate for a sports stadium than a church. Maybe we consider the kind of joy we have at a basketball game to be a little different than the joy we feel in church. Or maybe, and here I'm just guessing, maybe we don't often think very much about what we really have to be joyful about.

The verse above is translated differently in other versions of the Bible. It could

be "Give praise!" or "Sing!" or "Cry aloud!" or "Exult!" But in every case the psalmist seems to assume that the good news we have received is something that should make us express our joy.

We don't have to shout. We don't have to cry out loud. You might prefer to sing. But whether shouting or singing or crying out or exulting, when we realize what God has done for us we will respond enthusiastically. When we truly see what God has done, we must respond somehow!

God has taken away his judgment against us. It's like being acquitted in court, declared not guilty. Our enemies, those who accused us, have been cleared away. They've been driven from the courtroom. So we will "fear disaster no more."

Like a prisoner who has been released from certain death, how would you react?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, you have emptied me of sin and guilt. Now fill my heart with gratitude, and fill my lips with praise. Let me see your salvation and rejoice. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.*

Day Two: Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It's Advent. We're waiting for the celebration of Christmas. Paul says, "the Lord is near!" So how should we behave? What should our lives look like?

Well, Paul says that we should "rejoice in the Lord, always." And that makes sense, doesn't it? We're always happy when Christmas is coming. And we should be even happier to think that Jesus is coming again!

But what about his second instruction? Paul says that because Jesus is near, you ought to "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone." Huh?!? Why should Jesus' coming motivate us to be "reasonable"?

Other translations try to get across the sense of this

word in different ways. Some say we ought to have a gentle spirit, or a spirit of fairness or moderation. We should be considerate. My Greek dictionary offers the words yielding or kind.

What do all these words have in common? They are all connected to the idea of bending, of not insisting on your own way, of making accommodation for others.

Why would a person be unreasonable, unyielding, inflexible? Perhaps we act this way when we are afraid that we will lose. We must defend ourselves and our things. We can't afford to give an inch.

But how are we different now? We know that Jesus is near. We know that his promise is sure. And we know that we have a treasure that no one can take from us.

Look at the world around us. Look at the evils and dangers. Can any of them take away the gift God has given you? No. That's why you can afford to relax, to be flexible, to bend for others, to give.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, teach me to bend and not to break, to hold and not to grasp, to receive and rejoice and to wait for you. Amen.*

Day Three: Luke 7:18-28

Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."

In the Lord of the Rings books the ruler of Minas Tirith sends a messenger to the king of Rohan asking for help. His message is a red arrow, signifying that the kingdom is under attack and they need the Rohirrim to come to their rescue.

Immediately the king sends messengers in reply to let the people of Minas Tirith know that help is on the way. But his messengers do not make it through. They are killed before they can deliver their good news.

Messengers may be more than just letter carriers. Up to this point in the Gospel of Luke the Greek word for

angel (angellos) is used 18 times. And right here (in vs. 24 and 27) is the only place that it is not translated "angel" in English. Here the translators all use the actual meaning, "messenger." They don't want you to think that John is an angel, a spiritual being. But maybe they are wrong.

When you went to see John, what did you go out to see, Jesus asks. A prophet? Yes. But more than a prophet. "I will send my messenger..." my angel to prepare the way.

Is John more than just a letter carrier? A prophet carries the word of God, but John prepares the way for God's Son. The word that he brings has such great power it causes kings to tremble.

God's angels, his messengers, are not just letter carriers. They carry the good news which Paul says is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." And you are called his messenger!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you have called me to be a messenger, an angel. Give me courage to wield the power of your wonderful word, the Word of Life! Amen.*

Day Four: The Advent of Our King (LSB 331)

The Advent of our King our prayers must now employ, and we must hymns of welcome sing in strains of holy joy.

That's the very first verse of the very first Advent hymn in our hymnal. Maybe you have never paid much attention to these songs, but since so many verses of the Bible that announce the coming of God's Son tell us that we ought to sing and shout, maybe we should look at some of our Advent songs.

"Savior of the nations, come, Virgin's Son, make here your home! Marvel now, O heav'n and earth, that the Lord chose such a birth." The entire earth ought to marvel, be in amazement, at what God has done!

"Once he came in blessing, all our sins redressing..." It was not physical gifts he brought us. But he came to repay our debt.

"O Lord, how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright?" I know a woman who met her mother for the first time. She thought long and hard about what that meeting would be like. How will you

meet Jesus? Do you picture that happy day?

"O bride of Christ, rejoice, exultant raise thy voice..."

This song is based on our first lesson for next Sunday. Some of you can remember the joy of being a bride. Can you see yourself as the one whom Jesus comes to make his own?

"Lo! He comes with clouds descending..." This hymn is heavy and powerful. Jesus doesn't just come with happiness, but with great power and majesty. How can you prepare?

"The night will soon be ending; the dawn cannot be far. Let songs of praise ascending now greet the Morning Star!" Does your night time seem long? Some dark days never seem to end. But we know that Jesus is our Morning Star, and he shines the light that drives out darkness.

Perhaps today is a day for singing something besides White Christmas.

These devotions help us to think ahead about the Bible verses we will read in worship next week. They are written weekly by Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can learn more about our worship or our church at s.aulannarbor.org