



LIVING THE GOSPEL



**3rd Sunday of Advent
December 15th 2024**

Theme: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Gathering Prayer

All: 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. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Luke 3:10-18

¹⁰And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?" ¹¹And he answered them, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" ¹³And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you." ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

¹⁵As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ, ¹⁶John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people.

Gospel Focus

On the third Sunday of Advent, John the Baptist always makes clear that he is not the main character. He is the gifted preacher, gathering a following and compelling many to turn their heads towards God. His work overlaps with what Jesus will do. Yet he knows that his job is to prepare and foreshadow. Encounter with Jesus is still coming, and that is what all his preaching points to. As liturgical and lay ministers in the church, we too are called to prepare and foreshadow and get out of the way to let the Holy Spirit work. Ministerial work is a sacred partnership with God, but all of it—all our proclaiming and preaching, our work of hospitality, our distribution of Communion, our musical labor—is meant to facilitate and point all to have an encounter with Christ.

Gospel Reflection

In today's gospel, one group after another wants John the Baptist to help them know what they should do. They have been touched by his invitation to repent and believe in the good news, and have been washed free of their sinful choices from the past. But what is the next step? There is no one size fits all response. John's advice is tailored to each according to their circumstances.

Nothing he suggests is very dramatic or extraordinary. If you have extra clothing, then share it with those who have none. If you have food, then share it with those who are hungry. If you collect money, take only what you need. And if you have military might, do not abuse it. These admonitions seem obvious—they are things that “you will now” if you listen to the wisdom within. When Zephaniah declares, “God is in your midst,” it is a reassurance that divine guidance resides within each person and within each believing community when they allow their hearts to be turned toward the Holy One. The freedom and joy that well up from accepting God's forgiving love is, as Isaiah says in the responsorial psalm, like drawing water at a fountain of salvation. You can return to this fountain again and again to drink deeply of his saving power. A fountain circulates living, active water, always fresh and pure, not like a cistern that collects “dead” water in a stagnant pool. At the fountain of salvation, one drinks in joy, courage and strength, which overflow in our actions toward others.

The theme of joy weaves throughout the readings and the liturgy on this Gaudete (Latin for “rejoice”) Sunday. The joy is not only our own, from the forgiveness and salvation that set us free, but God also rejoices and sings, delighting in renewing us in love (Zeph 3:17-18). This joy and mutual delight want to be shared in wider and wider circles. What shall we do to make that happen? You will know.

In the gospel, John the Baptist speaks about a more advanced stage of turning toward God. Beyond the baptism of repentance and its freeing joy is a further “baptism” with “the Holy Spirit and fire” that Christ brings. Followers of Jesus will be empowered by the Spirit, who emboldens them for all manner of ministries. They will also undergo a purification process, a winnowing away of any imperfections that impede God's love and joy. The winnowing is not so much a process that separates out people who tend to do good and people who tend more to sin, rather, it is a refining for all who turn to Christ, a burning away of all that keeps us from experiencing God's delight and from knowing how to share that with others. This, then, is what distinguishes joy from optimism. A cheery outlook is not necessarily a Christian virtue. However, a radical joy that accompanies a refinement by fire is one of the paradoxical hallmarks of our faith.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Zephaniah 3:14-18

¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more. ¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Do not fear, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. ¹⁷The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing ¹⁸as on a day of festival. “I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

Responsorial Reading — Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6

R: 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)**

Give thanks to the Lord, acclaim his name; among the nations make known his deeds, proclaim how exalted is his name. **(R)**

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)**

Second Reading — Philippians 4:4-7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. ⁶Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

535. Jesus' public life begins with his baptism by John in the Jordan. (Cf. *Lk* 3:23; *Acts* 1:22.) John preaches "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins". (*Lk* 3:3.) A crowd of sinners (Cf. *Lk* 3:10-14; *Mt* 3:7; 21:32.) - tax collectors and soldiers, Pharisees and Sadducees, and prostitutes- come to be baptized by him. "Then Jesus appears." The Baptist hesitates, but Jesus insists and receives baptism. Then the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, comes upon Jesus and a voice from heaven proclaims, "This is my beloved Son." (*Mt* 3:13-17.) This is the manifestation ("Epiphany") of Jesus as Messiah of Israel and Son of God.

696. Fire. While water signifies birth and the fruitfulness of life given in the Holy Spirit, fire symbolizes the transforming energy of the Holy Spirit's actions. The prayer of the prophet Elijah, who "arose like fire" and whose "word burned like a torch," brought down fire from heaven on the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. (*Sir* 48:1; cf. *1 Kings* 18:38-39.) This event was a "figure" of the fire of the Holy Spirit, who transforms what he touches. John the Baptist, who goes "before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elijah," proclaims Christ as the one who "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (*Lk* 1:17; 3:16) Jesus will say of the Spirit: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!" (*Lk* 12:49.) In the form of tongues "as of fire," the Holy Spirit rests on the disciples on the morning of Pentecost and fills them with himself (*Acts* 2:3-4.) The spiritual tradition has retained this symbolism of fire as one of the most expressive images of the Holy Spirit's actions. "Do not quench the Spirit." (*1 Thess* 5:1.)

2447. The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. (Cf. *Isa* 58:6-7; *Heb* 13:3.) Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. (Cf. *Mt* 25:31-46.) Among all these, giving alms to the poor is

one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God: (Cf. Tob 4:5-11; Sir 17:22; Mt 6:2-4.)

He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none and he who has food must do likewise. (Lk 3:11.) But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you. (Lk 11:41.) If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? (Jas 2:15-16; cf. 1 Jn 3:17)

Sharing and Discussion

1. Which of John's exhortation in Lk 3:10-14, speaks to you most strongly? What do you have that could be better shared? How could you reform your work to more fully conform to God's will?
2. The 1st and 2nd readings both tell us to rejoice, but life does not always lend itself to rejoicing. How do you find the joy God promises in the midst of life's darker seasons?
3. How is your Advent preparations coming along? Is the Holy Spirit in the midst of the preparation?

Closing Prayer

All: Lord, you are the God who comes to us in fullness and in truth, even in the form of a child. In your gentle power, may you hear our prayers and fulfill our every need. We as this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.