

Dec 16, 2018: Advent 3C, Gaudete Sunday: Zeph 3:14-20; Canticle 9; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18

**Hope, Peace, and now Joy.** These are the themes of the first three Sundays of Advent and our preparation for the coming of Christ. We can feel a lot of pressure to live up to these ideals, though, can't we, when our lives might otherwise be full of worry and stress and exhaustion. But maybe it's our *concepts* of hope, peace and joy that are off.

We lit the candle of **hope** on the First Sunday of Advent. So what *is* hope? We might hope that the Sacramento Kings make it into the playoffs – they're looking pretty good right now. We might hope that the road surface on Kentucky Street gets well patched in the spring as we've been promised by the city. Maybe we feel hopeful, or maybe we feel cynical. Sometimes it depends on the day! But the true hope of Advent isn't at all about how we feel day-to-day, it's about two events: first a look back to the hope that the people of Israel had for their Messiah to come, which happened in Jesus, and then looking forward with hope to the return of Christ at the Second Coming, which is promised for some time in the future.

We lit the candle of **peace** on the Second Sunday of Advent. So what is peace? We all long for peace in our world today, and pray for peace in countries where conflict and wars are tearing people's lives apart. The

dictionary definition of **peace** is generally twofold – one being a cessation of war or violence; the other meaning quiet, tranquillity, or freedom from disturbance. But when are our lives ever free from disturbance for long? All in one day last Thursday at church, the plumbing in the ladies' bathroom blocked up, the vacuum cleaner broke, the power went off in the office and caused a very large print-run to get all messed up, and the sound system was behaving strangely. But the true **peace** of Advent is about more than nothing ever going wrong. It's about the knowledge we've been given of salvation by the forgiveness of our sins; it's about the light that shines as we dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, it's the light that guides our feet into the way of peace; and it's the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.

So today we lit the candle of **Joy**. The Third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete Sunday, Gaudete being Latin for 'rejoice,' and this is because of the first word of the passage that is set for this day from Paul's letter to the Philippians: In verse 4, Paul urges the Philippians to "rejoice in the Lord always." The inclusion of the word "always" suggests to us that regardless of the circumstances, we are to rejoice "in the Lord." It's a "joy" rooted in an ongoing relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, built on our trust in him.

But what is joy? [at this point a video about joy is shown]

Joy is a response to God's grace. The theologian Henri Nouwen described the difference between joy and happiness. While happiness is dependent on external conditions, joy is "the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death - can take that love away."

Joy is an act of resistance against the forces of despair.

It's also a joy that's rooted in our relationship in community. This does not necessarily mean that everyone always agrees or gets along. But each of us has a role to play in creating the supportive relationships that make up the foundation of "joy" and a cause for "rejoicing." Paul isn't saying that there's nothing to worry about or that the things we worry about are unimportant. But he places our anxieties, fears, and concerns in the context of our relationship to God.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Amen.