

## “A Sunday for Rejoicing”

- Pink vestments, pink candle in the wreath- it can only mean one thing!
  - This Sunday in Advent is called Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday in Advent, and the color is rose, not pink!
  - It is a little known tradition which began informally in the Anglican Church<sup>1</sup>
    - And only recently officially mentioned in the Anglican Common Worship
  - Gaudete literally translates from Latin as “rejoice”
  - The name came from the Introit for today’s Medieval Mass setting: it is a Gregorian chant that begins with the word “rejoice”
  - The theme is easily found in our readings as well
  - In Zephaniah, the prophet tells Israel to rejoice because God has taken away judgments and is in their midst
  - In Philippians, we are also told to rejoice in the Lord because the Lord is near
  - And then John the Baptist calls his listeners a Brood of Vipers, so there’s that.
    - Maybe that can bring a small smile to our faces!
    - Name calling is not a church growth strategy I have ever seen attempted, but who knows these days
  - Maybe we could even think of this Sunday as the “baby moon” before our lives are changed forever with the birth of a new baby, Jesus
  - Perhaps it is a moment to sit and relax a moment, taking a break from our spiritual preparing for the coming of Christ
  - A time when we can look up and remember why we are working so hard and what we are waiting for in the first place
  - As of today, we remember with excitement that it is only 13 more days until Christmas, the birth of Christ
  - And we experience his coming in our lives once again and God’s new redeeming work in creation
  - And if nothing else, to not forget that there is joy, and laughter, and playfulness found in the very heart of God’s work in us and the world

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaudete\\_sunday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaudete_sunday)

- This all sounded very good earlier in the week when I began work on this sermon
  - Advent is a joyful time and we are busily getting ready for Christ, and seeing family
  - We buy gifts to remember the big gift God gave us, look at Christmas lights to remember the light of the world that's come
  - And it seems that people, for the most part, are just a little more generous with one another around this time of year
  - And yet, I still find myself needing a reminder to breathe deeply and laugh deeply- it does not come naturally to me right now
  - Over the last couple of weeks, our nation has experienced another school shooting that has, at least for me, dampened that joyful feeling
  - There is a backdrop of social upheaval and possible violence in our nation
    - And with what can only be called an addiction, an obsession with firearms that is plastered all over the news these days
  - We hear of more variants, and now there is a winter storm west and north of us named Atticus... (they sure got that name right)
  - And as I wrote in my sword article this week- you can still read it online- <sup>2</sup>
    - St. Michael's is still working through the legal process to get some items returned that were stolen from the chapel the week of Thanksgiving
  - And let's not forget the grief from the past couple of years that likely weighs heavily on our hearts
  - You might be finding it hard to be joyful today
  - Or at least, like me, it might feel like a Sunday of contradiction- the layers of joy and worry, excitement and fear, all together
  - But maybe this is more like how the first Advent really felt
  - Mary and Joseph, unwed teenagers having a baby that was surrounded in mystery and miracle and confusion
  - Traveling by donkey when she goes into labor
  - I wonder if Joseph didn't laugh a little after that fact when telling his friends and family the story of Jesus' birth... at the absurdity of it all
    - Even if it might not have been too funny when it was happening
  - Life was hard for a Jewish family under Roman rule
  - Violence permeated their world too, as revolts were attempted and put down

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<sup>2</sup> <https://stmichaelsbarrington.org/church-blog/1092-a-note-from-our-rector-a-reminder-for-joy-and-laughter>

- And general discontent seemed all around- they were longing for something better
- Perhaps they thought: surely God has more in mind than this
- Perhaps we are thinking the same thing this morning
- So for a moment, I invite you to consider in a slightly different light what it means to wait for the coming of Christ
- And how, in the midst of current world events do we wait, and prepare, rejoicing in the spirit of Gaudete Sunday?
- This past week, I led a chapel service for the 3 and 4 year olds here at the preschool in person
  - I think I have mentioned it to you before- I get a lot of good sermon stories from them
  - Over the last year or so, they have been watching me on pre-recorded videos, due to COVID, and also my less-than-predictable schedule these days
  - And in the fall, we hear stories from the Bible's Old Testament, and each one keeps referring to Jesus as "God's secret rescue plan"
  - That although God's children throughout the Old Testament have turned away, God still loves them
  - Time and time again, God has loved and forgiven, watched as Israel turned away, and then forgave them when they came back
  - And from the beginning of creation, God has been preparing a big rescue plan to bring God's people back- and that plan starts with Jesus
  - It is such a simple and wonderful way of explaining the atonement to children
  - Jesus comes because we need rescuing, and through is life, death, and resurrection begins the process by which we are saved
  - Yes, it means that we can have eternal life after death
  - But it also represents a turning point in the whole of creation when God starts to remake everything to its intended purpose
  - When the horrible effects of sin are undone, death is no more, and God dwells among us
  - All of that starts with the Advent of Christ
  - When Jesus came so many years ago, and when Jesus comes this year in our lives, we can begin to be more of what God wants us to be
  - Perhaps like the people who lived so many years ago when Jesus was born
  - We rejoice while we wait- not because of how good things currently are

- But because with the coming of God's son- God's rescue plan made flesh- there is hope that things can be better
- This year, that is why we still rejoice on this third Sunday in Advent.
- In our New Testament reading, Paul is writing this morning to the church in Philippi, and he reminds them of God's ongoing work in them
  - And he is concluding his letter to them in the verses we hear read this morning
  - He is saying, "Rejoice always", or "be well", "take care", Be "calmly happy"<sup>3</sup>
  - It is a blessing in some ways, and a closing salutation his letter to them<sup>4</sup>
  - He tells them to focus and think on the things that are worthy of praise, honorable, just, pure, whatever is pleasing
  - Now we must remember that Paul is writing from a jail cell<sup>5</sup>,
  - He has likely been beaten, mistreated, and possibly close to starving
    - Rome generally did not take good care of its prisoners' needs
  - He is has also written rather sternly to this church so far, telling them
    - He said to continue to follow his teachings and obey them, and do it without murmuring and arguing!
    - Do not fall victim to false teachers who say that physical modifications are necessary
    - He even calls out two people by name and tells them to be of the same mind in the Lord...
      - no one wants to be called by name in Pauls' letters
    - And then he says he is sending one and maybe two people in his stead to straighten the church out...
  - But he also says to rejoice in the Lord
  - And that the Peace of God "will stand sentry" over your hearts and minds, like a military force protecting a castle
  - Think about that for a moment- our peace, our joy, the core of who we are in Jesus christ
    - Is protected by God like Fort Knox.
  - We too can always rejoice!
- How are your hearts today? Can you feel God keeping watch over you?

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<sup>3</sup> Olive Tree Strong's Dictionary "*Rejoice*"

<sup>4</sup> *Interpretation* New Testament Commentary, Philippians 4:4-7

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-philippians-44-7-5>

- Are you finding this season and the occasional snow flurries and Christmas lights to be light and joyful?
- Then embrace it, lean into it, smile and laugh and tell jokes, and enjoy being with loved ones.
- Or are you finding this season to be fraught with anxiety, fear, injustice, and feeling alone? Or is it both?
- You are not alone, not in this room and not in your hearts
- Like Mary and Joseph, and the church in Philippi- God is in those times and feelings to
- They might be our current experience, but they do not get to become our essence
- Because underneath God is watching over our hope and our joy, protecting it like bodyguard
- And out of that place of joy comes not only a calm peace, but an active laughter
- I think God wants us to be reminded today, not only of the still, solemn peace that we have- the serious kind
- But of the playful, of the adventurous kind, and maybe even a little holy mischief
- And don't forget to laugh- laugh at ourselves, at jokes, with people we love
- Laugh at the holy awesome absurdity of God the creator becoming creation, incarnate, in the form of a baby in a manger
  - To very unsuspecting and unlikely people
- Laugh about John calling the people a the brood of vipers
- Laugh at the pink vestments- I think they are a little humorous
- And then smile, that through the anxiety, the fear, and the absurdity, God is filling our world with love and light and laughter
- And most importantly, hope.
- It's Advent, God is coming- Rejoice!

Amen.