

3rd Sunday of Advent Year B

This Sunday is sometimes called Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete is translated 'rejoice', so this Sunday has a special emphasis on the good news of Jesus, thanksgiving and joyfulness in the run up to Christmas.

Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11

The Good News of Deliverance

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

For I the LORD love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;

for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

What's going on?

This important passage sets out what the servant of the Lord will be called to do. People who suffer, such as those who are oppressed, in prison, unhappy, will be helped by the one who is sent from God. God has declared a jubilee, an important concept in the thought of the Old Testament, when inequalities will be removed and people who have fallen at the expense of others will have their lands restored. A fair and just society will be brought about out of which everyone can flourish. This passage is also important in that Jesus was very familiar with its prophetic vision which he saw as his own mission. He not only refers to it in Luke 7.22 (for example) but its overtones can also be heard in the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount. This is the good news, then, that God not only wants to save his people and restore all those who suffer, but that he intends all human beings to flourish and grow. The final part of this vision of God's intention and desire is of blessing, joy, beauty and growth.

Psalm 126

A Harvest of Joy

A Song of Ascents.

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations,

'The LORD has done great things for them.'

The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

What's going on?

This psalm carries on the theme of suffering and sadness being changed into joy and praising. The psalmist has a picture of people going out to sow seed without hope, but returning with the richness of their crops, shouting for joy. This is what God does for his people who continue in faith.

1 Thessalonians 5.16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

What's going on?

In this letter, we are reminded to be joyful ourselves, thanking God, praying and praising him. We are to hold on to everything that is good and keep away from evil. In this way, living in the Spirit, we contribute to the preparation for God's coming. We are to continue to trust in God's faithfulness, and it is right to be reminded of this as we prepare to celebrate the mystery of God's incarnation as Jesus at Christmas.

John 1.6-8,19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And

they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord" ', as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

What's going on?

On a Sunday of rejoicing, we meet John the Baptist. The writer of the gospel ('a man sent from God whose name was John') identifies himself as having a similar role to John the Baptist, one who testifies, who tells the news about who Jesus is and what he has come to do. John the Baptist said clearly that he was not the expected Messiah, but was fulfilling the words of the prophet Isaiah about preparing the way for the Messiah to be recognised and known by others. His task was to focus people's attention on looking for and recognising Jesus. So this is also a message for us today, we should get ready to recognise and know Jesus and to tell others the news about who he is.



John the Baptist, by Titian, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, Italy.