

Third Sunday of Advent Year C



Pieter Bruegel the Younger
Landscape with John the Baptist preaching

Zephaniah 3.14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away the judgements against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
The 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
as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.
I will deal with all your oppressors
at that time.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.
At that time I will bring you home,
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the LORD.

What's going on?

The third Sunday of Advent encourages people to be joyful and this passage is a song of joy. The prophet Zephaniah promises the people of Israel that God will deliver them from enemies, rescuing people and changing their fortunes so that all is well. God always remembers and saves his people, so everyone should be filled with joy and praise.

Isaiah 12.2-6

Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say on that day:
Give thanks to the LORD,
call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.

Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

What's going on?

This is another song of joy as the prophet Isaiah speaks of his trust in God and God's promise to save his people. That trust requires faithful believers to tell others about God, to worship and let others see the joy that God instils in people who trust and believe in him.

Philippians 4.4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry 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.

What's going on?

St Paul, writing to his friends in Philippi tells them to rejoice and be happy now they are Christians. God is with them and they must witness to others by example. They must pray and give thanks and this closeness to God will lead to peace and joy.

Luke 3.7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'

And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' Even tax-collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.'

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His 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.'

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

What's going on?

John the Baptist tells people exactly what they have to do to get ready to meet Jesus. They have to stop being hypocritical and change the way they live. It's not enough to be one of the chosen people, if you live a corrupt life you can't expect to be offered God's salvation. People have to stop the corruption and evil living, and learn to share things and not cheat people out of money. All kinds of people came to John to be baptised and learn how to turn their lives round. Because of his powerful message and actions, some people thought John was the Messiah, the one sent from God to save them, but he was clear that he was the messenger and that the saviour was coming to judge the people and save those who really wanted in their hearts to change their lives.