

## 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019 – Third Sunday in Advent – Gaudete/Joy

Good morning to all of you on this “Joy” or “Gaudete” Sunday. As always, it is a joy to be among you this morning. Today, we lit our third candle on this Advent wreath. We are more than half-way around the wreath now. It is no longer long until we are celebrating Christmas, and the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.

Indeed, the period of Advent is a time in which we are all expecting a Baby. This may sound a little bit funny, but it rings true. From the youngest to the oldest, man and woman, boy and girl, those married and not married, and those without children and those with children and grandchildren. We are all waiting expectantly for a Child, for a Baby, to be born in Bethlehem.

What do we say if someone we know is expecting a baby? Firstly, we say “Congratulations! I am so happy for you! What wonderful news.” This is accompanied by joyful celebration, perhaps a party, gift giving and much joy and merriment. But the second thing we would say is one form or another of, “My goodness, you’re in for it! Your whole life is going to change. It will never be the same again.” Indeed, this is followed by words of warning and advice, about sleepless nights and the toddler years, offers of help and support, and deliveries of meals and other much-needed items.

This is Gaudete, or “Rejoice” Sunday, this is the third Sunday of Advent, this is a moment of joyful waiting. And on this day, two things may be said to us. Two striking commands which can change the course of our lives forever.

The first of these is simply, “Rejoice!”. It echoes the response to the expectant mother, “What wonderful news, congratulations.” We are excited, we celebrate, and are filled with gladness.

In the same way, since we are also all waiting for the Christ-Child, we rejoice with gladness in our hearts. Something wonderful is going to happen. You will receive a great Gift. The prophet Zephaniah sings to the people, "the King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst, you shall fear disaster no more." God is going to do great things for his people. All is well since God is here in our midst. As we read on in Zephaniah, “...the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.” This message of healing, of reconciliation and joy is echoed throughout the readings this morning. “Happy are those... whose hope is in the LORD their God,” as the psalmist writes. Rejoice, for new life in Christ is on its way.

The second of these is “Repent”. Although this may not be the response we think we should give to expectant families, I think we already do. In saying that “nothing will ever be the same again after this baby arrives”, we are really saying that the parents will need to adjust their ways of thinking and behaving. They will change their way of looking, and living.

Waiting for the Christ-Child, so too do we all need to repent, to “turn around to God”, to change our ways of thinking, behaving, looking and living. As we read about John the Baptist this morning, we remember his was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This repentance is running from sin and that which so easily traps us. The wicked ways bring ruin, as we read in the Psalm, and we are challenged to turn away from them, to seek to put our sin to death with new fervour. Repentance is part of the preparation for Jesus’ birth as much as rejoicing is. Put differently, one might ask, “how will we receive Him?” Will we take offense, as we read in Matthew, at His reign and Kingdom of forgiveness and of healing, of sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and good news to the poor? Will we allow this expectation in the coming Child to transform our vision and hope? Will we put our pride aside and allow God, the Child laid in a manger, to show us mercy and call us to repentance?

Rejoice, and repent. Everything changes for the better when the Child arrives. Everything changes for the better when we meet Jesus, God in the flesh,

as the Shepherds and Magi did, born at Bethlehem, and laid in a manger for a bed. But if you try to go on about your life as you did before, it will no longer work ever again. If we are going to take seriously the good news of Christmas, then things are going to be very different. The business of repenting because of the gift of a child is much the same as rejoicing. It has to do with transforming the life we are already living. Rejoice, and repent.

Rejoice, and repent. This double command is addressed to all of us as part of Advent, especially on this third and Gaudete Sunday. We wait for and try to prepare for the coming of the Child. This Child, Jesus Christ who is the Lord having taken on humanity, changes everything.

Rejoice, for the Child who is coming is the Saviour of the world, the gift of God for us and to us, who has the power to change our hearts and lives.

Repent, because from now on, everything will be different.