

Advent HERITAGE



Third SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

*Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I say, rejoice.
Indeed, the Lord is near.*

—Entrance Antiphon: Philippians 4:4-5

On this Third Sunday of Advent, the Church gives us a very particular mandate: *Rejoice!* And during these pre-Christmas days, it seems that there is a joy all around us. And yet the words of William Stringfellow in his essay, “Advent Is a Penitential Season,” give us pause: “For the greeting card sentiment and sermonic rhetoric, I do not think that much rejoicing happens around Christmastime, least of all about the coming of the Lord. There is, I notice, a lot of holiday frolicking, but that is not the same as rejoicing. In any case, maybe outbursts of either frolicking or rejoicing are premature, if John the Baptist has credibility. He identifies *repentance* as the sentiment of Advent.”

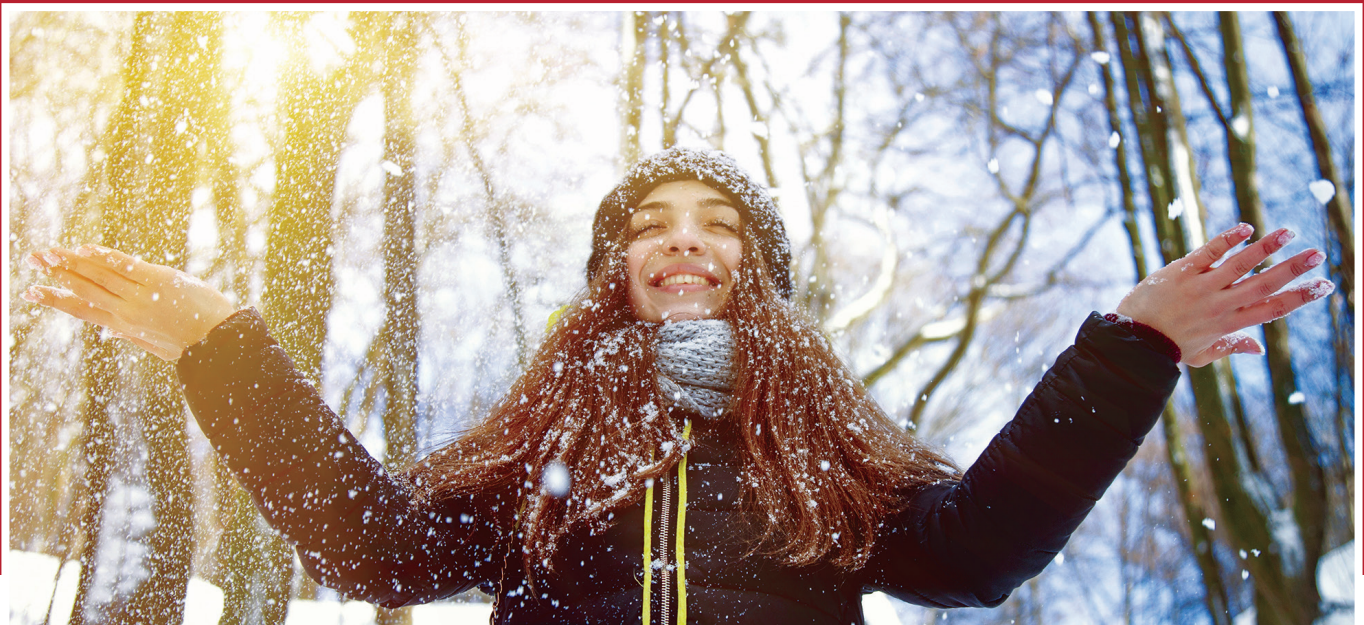
The themes of judgment, repentance, and salvation which emerge in the Gospel proclaimed this Sunday seem to be at odds with the spirit of Christian joy to

which we are also called. John the Baptist, prophet par excellence, proclaims the coming of the Christ as he calls his hearers to lead lives worthy of the new age of the Messiah: give up extortion and avarice and begin sharing with those who are in need. In short, manifest your interior faith through works of charity, peace, and justice.

So, how do we reconcile these seemingly contrasting ideas of repentance and joy? In answering this question, we can take a cue from Thomas Merton who observed that the “‘King who is to come’ is more than a charming smiling infant in the straw ... In Advent, we celebrate the coming and indeed the presence of Christ in our world. We witness to his presence even in the midst of all its inscrutable problems and tragedies.”

What we prepare to commemorate at Christmas has actually happened: God is in our midst. John’s clarion call for repentance is an exhortation for us to acknowledge the presence of Christ among us and to live accordingly. And so, our Advent hope and joy are not only focused on the approach of Christmas Day. Rather, we rejoice because God has kept his promises and has given us love and truth in Jesus.

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THE JESSE TREE: JOACHIM AND ANNE

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed, *"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God"* (Matthew 5:8). In this sense, purity of heart means more than simply avoiding sin. Its broadest, fullest meaning involves cultivating a spirit of simplicity and focus: "Remain simple and innocent, and you will be like little children who do not know the evil that destroys one's life" ("Shepherd of Hermas," Mandate 2:1). Being pure of heart means to focus our attention, our thoughts, and our desires on God's holiness and to allow ourselves to be filled with God's love.

Tradition tells us that Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary of Nazareth, were righteous, hope-filled believers, who prayed that God would grant them a child in their old age. Mary was God's gift to them, and it was Joachim and Anne who formed Mary to be a woman of faith, helping her to cultivate the purity of heart that Jesus praised in his sermon. Pope St. John Paul II reminds us, "On the threshold of the New Testament, it is precisely Joachim and Anne who prepare for the Messiah's coming by welcoming Mary as a gift of God and offering her to the world as the immaculate 'ark of salvation'" ("Angelus," July 25, 1999).

Together with their daughter, Joachim and Anne — and innumerable saints through the ages — have embodied the hope and trust that are so essential to a life with Christ. Their faith-filled longing allowed them to become important, although hidden, participants in the salvation of the world. In these final days of Advent, they invite us to keep watching and waiting so that we can welcome Christ with a rejoicing heart.

For Reflection

For what are you grateful on this third Sunday of Advent?

How have you experienced God's transforming presence and power in your life?

How do you share the joy of your faith with others?

ADVENT INSIGHT

Q. With Christmas fast approaching, can you give me some practical tips to prepare myself and my family that will help us stay grounded in what this holiday is really about? With all the commercialism, it's easy to stray.

A. Happy times and events bring fond memories and a renewed sense of love and kinship with others. The anticipation is half the joy of the event itself. The coming of the Lord is that kind of event that people have been looking forward to for generations with fervent hope and desire. It gave them strength and courage as they waited for the coming of the Lord.

We know that Christmas is rushed. Sales begin in August and carols blare long before the season begins. Everyone laments the commercial aspects of the season, but as Advent begins, do something to help you be more mindful of the Lord's coming. Use an Advent wreath, or enthrone the Bible prominently, or read the readings from the Bible assigned to each day.

Postpone the tree and decorations until closer to Christmas. Establish new family traditions and prayers that help remind everyone that we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Fasting, daily Mass, a special celebration of reconciliation, reaching out to those alienated from family or society, and visiting the homebound manifest the love of the Christ Child and the Holy Family. Resist the temptation to rush the season. In His own time and in His own way, God will come. Our task is simply to be watchful and ready.



As we learn about the family tree of Jesus, here are some ways to research your own.

CONNECT

Just because your deceased relatives aren't with you any longer doesn't mean you can't pray for them! Add the names of loved ones to a list, and make an effort to keep them in prayer.

EXPLORE

If you have deceased loved ones buried nearby, make an effort to visit their graves. The act of visiting them physically at their final resting place is a great way to feel connection.

SHARE

If you've got the time, you can share your family tree in a creative manner. A number of family tree charts can be purchased or printed. These genealogy wall charts are great conversation starters at family reunions!

Prayer

*Help us, Lord, to rejoice.
Help us to rejoice in your presence among us
and in the promise of your return in glory.
In your mercy, we find the promise of lasting joy,
a joy which no one can take from us
and which is stronger than any power of darkness.
As we continue to watch for the light of your coming,
help us to find comfort
in your Word
and strength for our journey
in your Eucharistic presence.
Amen.*

