

*Hark, the glad sound! The Savior comes,
the Savior promised long!*

*Let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.*

*He comes the broken heart to bind,
the wounded soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich the humbled poor.*

*Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
your welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring
with your beloved name.*

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good morning!

Good to be back in the pulpit again, and I'm very thankful for our wonderful priest associate who courageously jumped in last week to give Beka and me a chance to get away. While we were away, I began to cast my mind towards this Sunday, thinking especially about how the third Sunday of Advent is often called *Gaudete* Sunday among church nerds. It gets this name because for a very

long time in the western church, the third Sunday of Advent began with the Latin translation of a much beloved text from the fourth chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Philippians: in English, "Rejoice in the Lord, again I say rejoice!" Thus, "rejoice" in Latin, reads "Gaudete."

We didn't hear from Philippians this morning, with the lectionary favoring Thessalonians this year. Even still, we heard the apostle encourage that ancient church with the same command as to Phillippi. Listen again: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

This encouragement, command even, to rejoice is not just a Pauline charge to buck up and not simply a platitude to stay positive. Rather Paul is encouraging the Church towards a greater dimension of joy and wellbeing which is animated by our living relationship with the Savior. Joy, for the Christian heart, relies on the presence of God in our midst, and an openness to what God desires for us. I think that's what he meant when he wrote "do not quench the Spirit," and "hold fast to what is good abstaining from evil."

Paul's letter this morning helps us to remember that joy is a vital component of holiness; when Paul prays that God would sanctify his friends in Thessalonica, I believe he meant to draw his readers to the importance of the increase of joy in our hearts and therefore the increase of joy in the world at large as the bounds of Christ's kingdom is extended by our faithful ministry.

And even as we are meant to recall the joy of the moment, of the presence of Christ in and among us, warming our hearts and uniting us to God presently, we also see another shade of Christian joy: that of expectancy. Expectant Joy is at the heart of Mary's song this morning, the *Magnificat*, as she rejoiced in God's choice to draw her into His plan of salvation and looked to her Son's reign: the restoration of God's just and glorious rule in the world that had pretty much left Him behind. That same kind of expectation moved John to cry out in the wilderness to make straight the way of the Lord. In Christ's mother and cousin, we find the deepest human desires made manifest: that God would do something amazing to intervene on our behalf. The fulfillment of their joy in expectation, would be Jesus' birth and ministry. And just like them, Jesus is the

fulfillment of our wants and expectations, "the dear desire of every nation and joy of every longing heart."

Which is all to say, joy is all over the New Testament because the Early Church had such unique contact with the Christ. Paul, the Apostles, and the Evangelists sought to communicate the joy of Christ to that earliest church so that the earliest church could radiate that joy to the entire world. I think that remains a major part of our vocation even today- especially today. As joy-filled encouragers like Paul, as Christ-bearers like Mary, as voices in the wilderness like John we all have opportunities to radiate the light of Christ's joy even as we close out this very strange year. I know that the challenges of this past year have tested the boundaries of joy big time, even perhaps sadly testing the relevance of something as seemingly trite as delighting in something as simple as the love of God.

And maybe you're out there feeling further away from joy. Let me say, I get that. But if you are listening to me, and if you've made it this far without doing something else on your phone (which would be super awkward if you did that here in-person), consider that God has brought you into contact with my voice so that you can hear a

word of joy, hear anew the spirit of *Gaudete*, to bring you an encouragement to rejoice because God loves you, has not abandoned you, and awaits whatever you've got to say to Him. You can even complain about this year if you'd like. But be ready: once we get out of the habit of quenching the Holy Ghost, God is ready to "keep your spirit and soul and body sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And, as Paul reminds, "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this." After that, together, who knows what good God can do with us! But great good He shall do.

So, this coming week, rejoice in Christ's presence. Bear his joy to the world and speak of his joy in the wild places in which you find yourself.

To God be all Glory. Amen.