

## Advent 3 Year B, RCL

## Make Ready for Joy!!

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Psalm 126 or Canticle 3 or Canticle 15

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

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

Here we are, on the third Sunday of Advent already. Our days run together, and our weeks fly by, even with our commitment to observe a holy Advent – to reflect, to wait, to prepare. Today we find ourselves at a new place: our scripture readings have turned from the doom and gloom of pending apocalypse to the anticipation of joy! Our liturgical color has shifted just this one day from the purple of self-examination to the rose of rejoicing: this is Gaudete Sunday! Today we rejoice, and we rest a bit from the watchful waiting of Advent. We light our rose candle, and I laugh a little to think of the assortment of really pretty awful rose-colored vestments that some Anglican churches drag out of their vestment closets on this day. Our tradition is that for our two rose-liturgical days of the year – Gaudete Sunday in Advent, and Laetare Sunday in Lent, rose vestments and paraments are used. But for some strange reason, these rose-colored vestments seem to be made with a special license to be as bizarre looking as possible. Maybe they are meant to remind us that it's good to get a little silly on this day, when we take a big breath of relief from the deep work of preparation and reflection, and expand our hearts with the joy of what is coming!

Last night, forty or so of us gathered to share Advent time together, with a wonderful meal followed by time in the candlelit sanctuary for guided reflection, beautiful music, and quiet sung prayer. We reflected on the whole time span of Advent, beginning with the prophets. Our scripture today places us again with one of our favorite prophets, John the Baptist – our own favorite wildman of the hairy shirts, and the locust and honey. He tells us of who is to come; he warns us, once again, to be ready.

We began “getting ready” on the first Sunday of Advent, didn't we, when we began our church year anew. But what does it mean to “be ready?” What are we getting ready for? Usually when we think of the “new year,” we think of January 1<sup>st</sup>, with a long new year stretching out in front of us – plenty of time, we think. But in Advent, the beginning of our religious new year, there is a sense of urgency, of time running short.

Keep awake...the day is near...be ready. In Chronos or chronological clock-time, we prepare for Christmas: we enter a holy Advent to prepare our hearts for the mystery, the paradox, of the *Great I Am*, the King of Kings - born a poor little nobody, and tenderly laid in the hard wood of a manger. We prepare for that night, when Chronos, or human time, meets Kairos, or God's time.

In Advent and Christmas, we see this beautiful blurring of Chronos and Kairos. We have only a handful of short days to prepare for the imminent birth of a baby ~ who was born two thousand years ago. We have this sense of watchful readiness for the First Coming, which is ancient history now. In Advent, we prepare our hearts and our lives for the Second Coming: his imminent return, of which Jesus speaks to us urgently today, from a Gospel written twenty centuries ago. Chronos and Kairos blur again today when we hear in our Eucharistic prayer the verb tense shift from third person to first person: “And when he *had given* thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, “Take, eat. *This is* my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.” We’ll hear this shifting of time and space again in the Exultet of the Easter Vigil: “*This is the night*, when Christ *broke* the bonds of death...” first tense, past tense – present, past, and future...

It is a time of mystery, this Advent. Advent itself means “the coming,” or “the arrival.” And Jesus is telling us today to be ready for the one who is coming. So how do we prepare?

Sometimes I think we can confuse “being ready” with having everything in place, everything perfect. We try so hard to make the Christmas season just right – the perfect gift, the most memorable party, the most wonderful food. We drive ourselves, and our families, a little crazy trying to “be ready” for the perfect Christmas, which, as we all know, rarely shows up. Being perfect is not the same as being ready.

To truly be ready I think requires surrender, and trust. I think of Mary, whose beautiful *Magnificat* we hear today: her lovesong of thanksgiving to God for blessing her, for “*lifting up the lowly.*” In it she sings of her complete trust and surrender to God: “*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my savior.*” Imagine being this ready to receive the incomprehensible, to ponder these things in our hearts; to say yes with such joy.

Today on Gaudete Sunday, we find ourselves in the middle of the mystery of Advent, where past, and future, and present all intermingle. We celebrate what we know is to come: the births of the Christ Child, whose saving grace would change eternity for all, forever. On this day we rejoice with Mary in her song of love to God. We rejoice that Mary was ready, and chose to give herself in love to the angels’ good news – a small portent of what her son, Jesus the Christ, “*dolce super omnia – sweeter than all else,*” chose to give to us: himself, in love, for all of us lowly ones.

So let our readiness for what really matters in this season be as real as the wildness of John the Baptist, and let our joy on this Gaudete Sunday ring out with Mary’s when she says, “*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my savior!*”

Alleluia! Amen.+

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