

Sunday Thought

12th December 2021 Third Sunday of Advent

Readings

Zephaniah 3: 14 - 20

Canticle: Isaiah 12: 2 - 6

Philippians 4: 4 - 7

Luke 3: 7 - 18

Advent Doors

I could not totally disagree with the friend who commented, 'Christmas becomes more and more secular.' She went on to speak of her disappointment at trying to buy Christmas cards with nativity pictures, and signed off with, 'Even Advent Calendars are more about chocolate than Jesus!' However, I must concede that day twenty-five and the opening of the door to the last temptation is still a moment of joy when promises come true.



Our readings today all tell of promised joy, beginning with the prophet Zephaniah. He speaks words of warning to his people about the terrible consequences of broken relationships with God, but also with joyful optimism looks forward to times of change and renewal. 'Rejoice with all your heart,' he says. 'The dark days are over. The Lord your God is with you. He loves you and is giving you new life. Your enemies are defeated. Exiles are coming home, your sick will be healed, and your land will be prosperous again.' Open the door. The last temptation is gone! God is with us! Immanuel! Rejoice!

Paul's words to Christians at Philippi take us further. The best news of all time is still 'God is with us!' but now that is a personal experience of living with him through Jesus. He says that the source of our joy is our 'union with Christ Jesus'. His coming at Christmas is truly *God with us*. It's the beginning of a wonderful story of his life and teaching for the Kingdom of God, of his death and resurrection to ensure us our place in the Kingdom, and of the gift of God's Spirit uniting us with him. He will live in us and we in him, just as he promised his first disciples. Great Joy!

However, before we can open the last door and be sure of the joy of 'God is with us' there are other doors to open. That's the thought from John the Baptist's preaching. He shouts to everyone who will listen, 'God is with us. Open the door and let him in!' But the doors to open may be many and are often very personal. John's preaching is reminiscent of many revivalist preachers. Crowds came out from the towns and villages to hear him. Imagine him today on the bandstand in the city centre. The busy shoppers would probably pass at a distance and even look for back entrances to the stores or make their purchases elsewhere.

That's not surprising when the John, the preacher, tells his audience they are like a pit of snakes or like dead fruit trees ready to be chopped down! But, as in other revival times, the Spirit breaks down barriers, draws people to listen and to ask *'what shall we do to put our lives right for God? What door do we need to open to let the Saviour in?'*

John is ready with an answer. He suggests a personal response from each one. *'You people who are rich at the expense of the poor must open the door to fair living and generosity. Tax collectors, go on and open up yourselves to honesty and fair dealing. Soldiers, your door has to be contentment with pay and a right use of authority.'* I wondered what other people he singled out and for what reason – until perhaps he comes to me! What door does he suggest I have to



open?

So, John urged people to change their ways if they wanted to see a new world for God. No chocolate behind closed doors but a whole new life with Jesus.

John had one more preaching illustration – that of the winnower sorting wheat from chaff. It was a simple way of suggesting we allow Jesus to sort us out for a life united to him and to be ready to share his glory when he comes again.

That is the message of Advent
Gaudete! Rejoice!

Rejoice! A Prayer (with Isaiah 12: 2 - 6 in mind)

Lord, we rejoice and give thanks for times
when you have dispersed our anxieties and fears;
when you have given us new strength of body, mind, and spirit
and refreshed us - like a long cool drink on a hot, thirsty day.

The word "Rejoice!" is written in a vibrant purple, cursive script. The letters are thick and expressive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right. The background is a solid, light beige color.

Lord, we rejoice and give thanks.

You are everything we need.

We want to tell the whole world what you have done:

To shout with joy and faith that Christmas means *'Immanuel. God is with us!'*

Christ Jesus is with us right to the far end of everything.