

Devotions for the Third Week of Advent

The third Sunday of Advent is traditionally referred to as “Gaudete Sunday.” In Latin, *gaudete* means “rejoice.” Our focus this week is on rejoicing, as we continue to prepare for Christ’s coming.

In week 1, you were invited to find a branch that could be used as part of your table display and as a prompt for prayer. In week 2, you were invited to create simple origami paper lanterns.

For this week, hang your lanterns onto the branches (if possible), or on your family Christmas tree, or in some other visible space.

Light three candles on your Advent wreath. With a few deep breaths, offer a word of thanks to God for this day (whether it is ahead of you or behind you). Sing one verse of this week’s hymn, and then proceed to the texts and reflections for each day.

Background on this week’s hymn: “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

Based on the text of Luke 2:8-14, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” offers a rich theological message of the good news of the Christmas season. It has been referred to as “much more than just a Christmas hymn, this is a hymn on ‘humankind’s re-creation, reformation, and reconciliation in the life and witness of Jesus Christ.”¹¹

Charles Wesley, the writer of this hymn, was the brother of John Wesley (forefather of Methodism) and a prolific hymnwriter. It was Charles’ goal to teach sound doctrine to people who were poor and illiterate. It is often noted that Methodism was born in song, and Charles was the chief songwriter.

While walking to church on Christmas Day, Charles was inspired by the sounds of London church bells ringing. He wrote the words to the poem, “Hark,” which first appeared in *Hymns and Poems* in 1739, with the opening line of, “Hark, how all the welkin (heavens) rings.” The words were later adapted and turned into the hymn we know and sing today. The tune is an adaptation of Mendelssohn’s choral cantata *Festgesang* of 1840.

Sing this hymn enthusiastically, paying attention to its message of good news of Christ’s birth.

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King;
peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled,”

Joyful, all ye nations rise; join the triumph of the skies;
with angelic hosts proclaim,
Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

*Refrain: Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold Him come,
offspring of the virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail, the incarnate Deity!
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel!

Refrain

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
Born to give us second birth.

Refrain

Monday: Zephaniah 3:14-15

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away the judgments against you,
he has turned away your enemies.
The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall fear disaster no more.

Reflection:

In times like these, it is easy to feel overcome by anxiety or fear. How does the assurance that the Lord is in your midst help you to find joy?

Tuesday: Zephaniah 3:16-17

Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.
The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;

he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing
as on a day of festival.

Reflection:

Consider the people who bring joy and love to your life. How do loving human relationships help teach us about God's love for us?

Wednesday: Isaiah 12:2-4

Surely God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;
he has become my salvation.
With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
And you will say in that day:
Give thanks to the Lord,
call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.

Reflection:

Thinking through the past days or weeks, how has God renewed your strength? How can you offer words of joy or strength to someone else today?

Thursday: Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Reflection:

In this season of Advent, there always seems to be "too much to do and too little time to do it in." Busy-ness often leads to anxiety and frustration. How can you shape your day and your mindset to one of rejoicing and gratitude for God's goodness?

Friday: Luke 3:7-9

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to

raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Reflection:

Even in the spirit of rejoicing, this season of Advent reminds us of our need to be repentant as we prepare for Christ's coming. What in my life do I need to ask God for forgiveness and help?

Saturday: Luke 3:19-14

The crowds asked [John], "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise"... and to the tax collectors he said, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you"... To the soldiers he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

Reflection:

Imagine you are in the crowd listening to John, as people in the crowd ask him, "What should we do to prepare?" How might John instruct you today to prepare for the coming of God's reign?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus,

Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.

We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day,

We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.

To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!"

Amen.

– Henri J.M. Nouwen

SENDING

Here is an idea for rejoicing this week – and sharing that joy:

Join with others from the congregation for some informal caroling. There are three more opportunities this week (on Monday 13 December, Wednesday 15 December, and Sunday 19 December). See details in the bulletin or on the church website.

ⁱ Carlton Young, editor of the United Methodist Hymnal.