

Philippians 4:4-7
Third Sunday of Advent
December 12, 2021

Christians often lament the commercialism of Christmas. After hearing John the Baptist in today's Gospel reading, I would expect he might have a few things to say about it also. Those feelings don't mean we are dour-faced Scrooges. Joy is the recurring theme in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians as we see in this text. Tyng his thoughts into the current season of the church year we consider

CHRIST'S ADVENT BRINGS JOY

- I. Overflowing in your life
- II. Building a prayerful trust
- III. Filling you with peace

Christ's advent brings joy overflowing in your life no matter what circumstances you face. Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" A voice inside might be responding, "You gotta be kidding. Not with all the Covid cases, political wrangling and racial issues in the world, much less the mess in my own life, my troubles and frustrations. What is there to rejoice over?"

Yet God's inspired writer said "always" and repeated the instruction to rejoice. Take note of the phrase that followed the imperative, "Rejoice." Paul said, "In the Lord." Knowing him changes everything. Think of the event we are preparing for: Christmas. What volumes it speaks! It is all about God's love. He didn't want the crown of his creation lost eternally so made the ultimate sacrifice of his own Son. Jesus left the glory of his heavenly home and entered humbly into our existence. Here he lived and died in our place. The results were that all our wrongs are paid for. We are forgiven and viewed as holy in God's sight, brought into his kingdom as his children through faith. How can you compare what we deserved with what we got and not be filled with joy?

As a result, our days are blessed with his loving care. He is watching over us, providing for us and protecting us. His blessings are showered on us daily.

As we look to the future Paul reminded us, "The Lord is near." He was not referring to his presence close beside us, although that he certainly is. There is the other coming for which Advent prepares us. Jesus is returning on the Last Day to judge the world and to escort us to heaven. There we will have the grandest experience you can possibly imagine and beyond what you can envision. That joy

remains yours even on the gloomiest of days. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

The impact of God's love for you will be evident in your life. "Let your gentleness be evident to all." Being blessed and filled with God's actions in Jesus causes us to share what we have received with others. The word translated as "gentleness" is a term that needs a whole paragraph to describe rather than a one-word translation. Sometimes it is explained as bigheartedness or sweet generosity. It shows consideration. We think of others, not just ourselves, especially being concerned about the weak, the aged, little children and those who are helpless. We are yielding as we place others before ourselves. The quality does not describe weakness, however, that we are so downtrodden that we can do nothing else. Quite the opposite, it refers to one who is superior and stronger nobly bending down to help another.

There was a needed application of this quality to the Philippian congregation. A pair of women were quarreling. They were both believers and had been helpers to Paul, but they clashed. Christians are not perfect people. The Apostle didn't take sides in the issue but called for each to step back and remember who they were. He called for them to show gentleness and patient endurance. We will put up with slights. Our Old Adam resists such a response. "What about my rights?" it shouts. "I want to get back at the person who wronged me."

Our lives bring plenty of opportunities to put this gentleness quality into practice. We suffer wrongs; irritable people surround us, whether they are acting intentionally or not. When provoked, recall what Jesus did for you. Focus on the blessings given, be filled with joy and let it overflow in Christian love and gentleness.

II.

The more we focus on Jesus and growing in faith through the gospel, the more he will work in us building a prayerful trust. That trust will have the effect of calming anxieties. Are you a worrier? We know the many potential causes of harm in our lives. Wise planning involves analyzing what could go wrong and preparation for those contingencies. That's different from worry. Some of our worrisome behavior comes because we want to be in control and we aren't. We feel helpless. We worry about our family, our finances, the future, our nation, the health of ourselves and loved ones, if we are prepared for retirement, or about passing a test or course. What does worrying solve? We get worked up and are distracted from what needs to be done. Our energy is sapped from a sleepless night of worry. Worrying is not wise in a practical manner.

It also expresses a lack of trust in God. When worrying we imply he can't handle the situation so I have to shoulder it, which I am unable to do.

Paul gives a better solution to life's problems. "Present your requests to God." That means pray. Turn over your needs to him, not as a last resort but right away. He wants his children to talk to him. He cares about you. If he was willing and able to solve your biggest problem (that being sin), he can handle whatever else you are dealing with. That is why the text included the words "in everything" as it directed prayer.

In addition we pray "with thanksgiving." Those words are more than a reminder to the child engrossed with enjoying a gift from Grandpa and Grandma that we had to remind them, "Now what do you say?" to elicit the proper response, "Thank you!" There is a reason we can give God thanks even as we are presenting our requests. We know he answers our prayers and does so in the best way according to his unlimited knowledge. Pray with confidence and acknowledge his goodness even before you see the answer.

Advice columns in the newspaper (yes, I still prefer the print form of information) frequently include a letter from disappointed grandparents whose family does not acknowledge receipt of gifts or express appreciation for them. If that happens with items presented at a visible gathering or sent to them, how often does it happen with God, whose gifts often seem to come naturally and continually? Remember, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Pray to him, give thanks and trust him for all your needs of body and soul, for time and for eternity.

III.

Joy in our Savior's coming this Advent season also has the effect of filling you with peace. You have peace as you live in the present. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." I'm sure you recognize that verse. It's called the Votum and is spoken after the sermon. The peace is God's peace. It starts with the peace of forgiveness. It tells us all is right with God. What more do we need?

Having forgiveness causes us to look at everything in a different light. We do not fear punishment (You might recall from Reformation history how Martin Luther struggled with the concept of God being angry about his sins so depriving and harming himself to make up for them.), as if the only thing we know about him is a demand to shape up or else. Instead, with sins paid for we anticipate his

blessings. That assurance will calm the anxieties that we noted before. This peace from God "transcends understanding." It's more than something that can be produced by mental exercise or human reasoning. God is for us, and there is a saying, "God plus one makes a majority." That one is not the weightier part of the equation; we're just along for the ride. Enjoy it as God blesses each day and handles your issues. Be filled with peace.

His peace effects how you face the future. There are lots of unknowns, yes. Many pitfalls and dangers line our paths. But you know that God wants you in his heaven. Surely he will take care of you until you get there.

We focus on the joys that are to come in eternity. That thought brightens each day. Many people, even ones who claim to know Jesus, feel you can't be sure about getting into heaven. But you can be. That's the difference between grace and works, between trusting Jesus and relying on your own efforts or even your own faith. Jesus, the Savior, came on Christmas and did his job, the mission impossible for any of us, by paying for sin. He presents it to you. There is nothing more for you to add or complete. It is 100% by Jesus, 100% won. It's wrapped, ready and waiting. Take him at his word. When you understand and recognize grace you have certainty. You have boundless joy. Then peace fills your heart.

It all goes back to our joy in Jesus. What we have in him is not limited to the four week season of Advent. He is always overflowing with his love in your life, building a prayerful trust and filling you with peace. He came and is coming again. The time is growing closer every day. Rejoice!