

COMMENTARY
3rd Sunday of Advent – Year C

Resources:

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Light of the Word*.

Christopher West, *Word Made Flesh: A Companion to the Sunday Readings (Cycle C)*

Wansbrough, H. (2012). *The Sunday Word: A Commentary on the Sunday Readings*. London; New York: Burns & Oates.

FIRST READING: Zephaniah 3:14–18a

- ¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!**
- ¹⁵The 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.**
- ¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.**
- ¹⁷The 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**
- ¹⁸as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.**

“Zephaniah prophesies that Jerusalem, the Holy City, sacked by the Babylonians, will be restored. It will be a day of overwhelming joy, when the Lord will truly be king in Jerusalem. After the Exile in Babylon, the Jews returned to Jerusalem, but they were continually dominated by one set of foreign rulers after another, tossed from one to another as the plaything of their powerful neighbours. They longed more and more to be free, to have God as their only ruler” (Wansbrough, 36).

“The first reading, which calls on Israel to exult, speaks to its own time but also points to the future: “On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem...” This means that today man can already rejoice over what is yet to come. And he can do this not with a mixture of joy and fear, but in a joy that is based on God’s own joy: “The Lord rejoices and exults over you as one sings joyfully at a feast.” For the believer, Advent is not a time of vacillating between fear and hope, for the arrival of the Redeemer that has been announced is a certainty. The feast is sure to get underway. All that is asked of us is that we not let our heads droop in unbelief or mistrust about whether God will keep his promise. This applies to his first advent as much as his second” (Balthasar, *LW*, 262).

“In this Sunday’s first reading, we have a powerful prophecy of the eternal nuptials to be consummated between God and humanity within Mary: Shout for joy, O daughter Zion... the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst” (Zep 3:14, 15). As Pope Benedict XVI expounds, “Literally it says: ‘he is in your womb.’” And St. John Paul II tells us that “in the pages of the Annunciation... the New Covenant is presented to us as the Nuptial Covenant of God with man, the divinity with humanity... God’s nuptial love, announced by the prophets, is concentrated on... the virgin-bride to whom it is granted conceiving and bearing the Son of God.” *This* is the joy of all the earth, the source of all hope and gladness!” (Christopher West, *Word Made Flesh*)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Isaiah 12:2–6

***R. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.***

**²Surely 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.**

**³With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴And 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.**

**⁵Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.**

**⁶Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.**

SECOND READING: Philippians 4:4–7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“This joyful hope grows stronger in the second reading, to the point that we are commanded not to be anxious about anything. We are told not merely to be free of anxiety, but to have a “joy in the Lord”, which alone can bring “peace”, which “surpasses all understanding”, and which eliminates any thought that our hope might be in vain. But this joyful glimpse of the Lord’s approach must prove itself in mutual love within the community, a “kindness” recognizable even to non-Christians. This joy with which we approach the Lord must be an apostolic joy” (Balthasar, *LW*, 262).

“How can you know that you are living in God’s will? This is the sign: If you are troubled about anything, that means you are not completely abandoned to God’s will. The one who lives according to God’s will is not troubled about anything. If he needs something, he surrenders it and even himself to the Lord. He places it in his hands. If he does not get what he needs, he remains calm, as though he had received it. He is not afraid, whatever happens, for he knows that it is God’s will. When he is afflicted with illness, he thinks: I need this sickness, otherwise God would not have sent it. He thus preserves peace in body and soul.” – Starets Silvan, quoted in *Into Your Hands Father*, pg. 21.

“St. Paul exclaims in the second reading, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!” Why? “The Lord is near.” How near? He is within us. With Mary as the model, we can say that in some way all members of the Church have become Christ-bearers, pregnant with God. “Let this be known throughout all the earth” (Is 12:5) – God wants to marry us and fill us with eternal life! If we say yes to God’s marriage proposal, God will “renew [us] in his love” (Zep 3:17), and for all eternity we, with Mary, will “cry out with joy and gladness” (Is 12:6)” (Christopher West, *Word Made Flesh*).

GOSPEL: Luke 3:10–18

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” ¹¹ In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³ He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

“The Gospel describes how the Baptist instructed those who wanted to begin a new life... What John insists on can be defended out of the prophets; there is no need to confuse him with the coming Messiah. The Messiah, before whom the Baptist humbles himself, will bring a completely different means of purification: the Holy Spirit, who will reveal our sins to us from God’s perspective and who can burn them away with his fire. He will also confront us with the ultimate decision between Yes and No, wheat and chaff” (Balthasar, *LW*, 261).