

Sermon followed by Service - December 15, 2024 - Zephaniah 3:14-17

Are you ready? Are you ready for “Joy to the world!”? Are you ready for “Joy, joy, joy!” Sometimes joy isn’t easy. So many of you know that better than I do. Sometimes joy just seems out of place, like in our lesson.

In our lesson, Zephaniah says: **“Be glad and rejoice!”** But read Zephaniah and those words seem almost out of place. Zephaniah is a short book, 53 verses in three chapters, with the first 40 of those 53 verses preaching fire and brimstone from God: **“I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth. I will stretch out my hand against Judah. I have decided to assemble the nations, and to pour out my wrath on them. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.”** But then God says something so Zephaniah can say: **Be glad and rejoice!**

Judah had tasted God's anger; God's people had felt their God's punishment. Famine and drought had starved the people. Enemy armies had made Judah pay with her gold and with her blood. Judah had seen her sister Israel raped and kidnaped and then gone. Judah knew the bitter taste of God's medicine. And more was to come; Jerusalem would be destroyed and her people taken hostage. Judah would learn how God hates sin; and Judah would learn to put sin in its place, or else.

We’ve felt how God hates sin, haven't we? We’ve felt God fighting the sin in our lives so that sometimes it feels like God is fighting against us. And we know there are times God needs ... that we need God not just to put evil in its place but we need God to put us in our place. We know that, don't we?

The part of Zephaniah we're looking at today isn't for people content with their sin. Our lesson today - Rejoice and Be Glad! - is for people fighting against sin, longing to be right with God. For people who really love God, but still get hurt. For people who really try to be God's kind of people, but find it so hard. Our lesson is for God's people who on this battlefield of God against evil find life to be so hard, to be so full of hurt, that it's easy to think that God must have forgotten us, or turned his back on us; or even that God is out to get us. And to those people, to us, what does Zephaniah say: **Be glad and rejoice!**

We might think: "What?" On those days when it seems that life, instead of clicking on track, is ticking like a time-bomb - how can we be glad and rejoice? When God's judgment "the soul that sins - it shall die" is ringing in our ears, and we see our sin - how can we be glad and rejoice? Listen to Zephaniah: **"Be glad and rejoice, the LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy."**

The Lord has taken away our punishment; that's why we can rejoice and be glad! So what sin from your past makes you sick inside when you think of meeting God? What sin makes you want to pretend Judgment Day isn't coming? When something goes wrong, what sin flashes into your memory? **"Be glad and rejoice, the LORD has taken away your punishment."** Maybe you have some skeleton in your closet, some sin from your past that comes back to haunt you ... perhaps the last time you yelled at your family, or let them down, has you torn up inside ... perhaps that pain in your joints has you wondering, "What did I do to deserve this?" **"Be glad and rejoice, the LORD has taken away your punishment."**

Even when our hopes and dreams stall; even when our body aches and our heart hurts; even when it seems that God's war on evil is sweeping us away and it seems that God has tossed us out with the garbage - with Jesus we get to remember and with Jesus we even get to be glad and rejoice: **“the LORD has taken away our punishment.”**

That's what Christmas with Christ is about. Christmas with Christ isn't about trees and lights and giving and gifts and cookies - now those can all be great ways to celebrate Christmas - but Christmas with Christ is about Jesus coming as the Lamb of God to take on himself the punishment we had coming. Christmas with Christ is about Jesus taking our place under God's law; yes, Christmas with Christ is about the cross for Christ. God punishing Jesus in our place; that's how “the LORD has taken away our punishment!” That's why we can be glad and rejoice!

The joy of Christmas isn't just the joy of family and friends, trees and lights, gifts and giving. The joy of Christmas is the joy of sins forgiven. It's the joy of love - God loves us; God wants us in his life. It's the joy of relief and hope - God hasn't given up on us; he hasn't turned his back on us. It's the joy of having God for us!

It's good for me to remember that because sometimes, even with Christmas right in front of us, sometimes we aren't filled with a whole lot of joy. Why? Loneliness can be a real joy-killer this time of year. We might be living alone; or we might be surrounded by family and friends, but still feel lonely, because they just don't know, they just don't get it; they don't say what we need to hear; they don't love the way we need love. So we feel alone. At this time of year, loneliness can be so hard. What else might kill the joy this season? Worry - sickness doesn't take a break this season, does it? Family

fighters don't all turn to smiles. Bills don't all go away. But even when we feel alone ... even when worry is grinning at us ... what does Zephaniah say? **"Be glad and rejoice."** Why? We're not alone - **the LORD, king of Israel is with us!** Even though we can't see him or hear him - we have Jesus, "Immanuel," God with us.

When we feel down, we get to remember what Zephaniah says: **"The LORD is with you; never again will you fear any harm. The LORD is with you, he will quiet you with his love. Do not let your hands hang limp, the LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save."** We don't need to worry; the LORD is with us!

We can be glad and rejoice even if we get knocked down today. We can rejoice and be glad even if we know we'll get knocked down tomorrow. We can be glad and rejoice even when it seems everything is going wrong and it seems we're about to lose everything that matters. Why can we rejoice and be glad? Our Lord is with us. He's with us to cushion our falls; he's with us to heal our hurts; he's with us to pick us up; he's with us to give us strength; he's with us to meet our needs. He's with us to make sure we get home. Yes, that's what Christmas is about - not just smiles today, but - 2000 years ago God gave us a part of heaven in Bethlehem so he can give us all of heaven forever.

That is what the joy of Christmas is about. The joy of being together with God! The joy of having God to bless us! So **be glad and rejoice**. Be glad and rejoice with your family and friends; be glad and rejoice with the Christmas lights and Christmas trees; be glad and rejoice with good food and gifts. Be glad and rejoice that they all come from your loving God. But most important of all - be glad and rejoice that you have God! Amen.

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we see (and experience) highs of holiday happiness and lows of holiday loneliness and sadness.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... our Lord gives us his best reason for joy - Jesus!

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

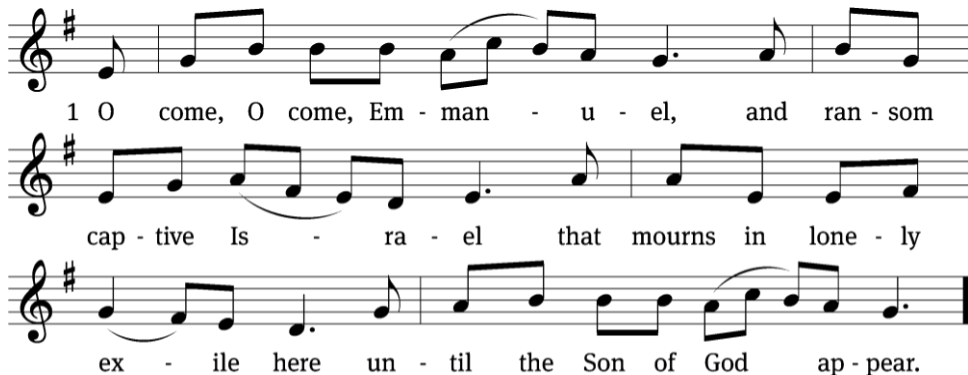
C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION OF SINS AND LIGHTING RITE

M: When God created the world, he made the crown of his creation - the human race - in his image (Genesis 1:26). Perfect people lived in a perfect world in a perfect relationship with God.

C: **But mankind rebelled against God, bringing sin into the world and death to all. God declared the wages of sin to be death (Romans 6:23). We too are guilty, and we confess our sinful thoughts, words, and actions.**

M: However, God - who is Love - did not want to be separated from his children forever. He promised a Savior who would bear the punishment for sin, defeat the devil, and break the bonds of death.



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som
cap - tive Is - ra - el that mourns in lone - ly
ex - ile here un - til the Son of God ap - pear.

Refrain

Re - joice! Re - joice! Em - man - u - el
shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

M: When the time had fully come, God sent his Son. Jesus, our Savior, has paid the ransom for your debt; your sins are forgiven (Galatians 4:4,5). In view of God's mercy, today we light the joy candle. Though we have not seen Jesus, we love him; even though we do not see him now, we believe in him (1 Peter 1:8).

C: **And we are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for we are receiving the end result of our faith, the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:8,9).**

O, come, our Joy, whose love for-gives— Whose death as-sures that
we will live! Move us to heed the call, "Re - pent!"
And trust, for your sake, God re-lents. Re-joyce! Re-joyce!
Em-man - u - el Shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

M: In the joy of God we go to the world - to our friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors. We regard no one from a worldly point of view. If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 16-18).

C: Yes, God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. Jesus, who had no sin, became sin for us; in him we have become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

Refrain

Re - jice! Re - jice! Em - man - u - el
shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp). The first staff contains the melody for the words 'Re - jice! Re - jice! Em - man - u - el'. The second staff continues the melody for 'shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!'. The music is written in a simple, accessible style with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus Christ, and come with the good news of your mighty deliverance. Drive the darkness from our hearts, and fill us with your light; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Zephaniah 3:14–17

Sing, Daughter Zion;
shout aloud, Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
Daughter Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away your punishment,
he has turned back your enemy.
The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you;
never again will you fear any harm.
On that day
they will say to Jerusalem,
“Do not fear, Zion;
do not let your hands hang limp.

The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing."

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 66C

Refrain



Let all the earth sing out our Sav-ior's praise,



cry out to God with joy.



Shout for joy to God, / all the earth!

Sing the glory of his name; make his praise / glorious.

Praise our God, all / peoples,

let the sound of his / praise be heard;

he has pre- / served our lives

and kept our feet from / slipping. *Refrain*

Come and hear, all you who / fear God;
let me tell you what he has / done for me.
If I had cherished sin / in my heart,
the Lord would not have / listened;
but God has surely / listened
and has / heard my prayer.
**Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. Refrain**

SECOND READING

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

CHOIR

“Truly God Is With Us”

Words & Music Written by Patricia Thies and Tim Samelson

*We all are weak like wind-whipped grass, which withers, dies and blows away.
God promised to our forefathers a Savior who would rise one day.
Prepare the way, make straight the path; put off your sins, bow down, confess.
Oh, gather us to God again; and lead us from this wilderness.*

*A baby wrapped in swaddling clothes; could this child be the Savior?
The One foretold so long ago; to win for us His favor?
It is the Christ He promised us, this child now born of Mary.
Our Savior, Lord, Emmanuel, now truly God is with us!*

*This baby in a feeding trough; what could he do to help me?
My mind is far too small to see, or comprehend His destiny.
He suffered all that I deserved, and died forsaken on a tree.
He sacrificed His perfect life to win a heav'nly home for me.*

*Now let us join the angel choir; sing Alleluia at His birth.
The servant King in human form; His sacrifice brings peace on Earth.
O, Shepherd of our souls, all praise; please guard, protect and guide us.
You paid the price to conquer death, Our King of Kings, victorious!*

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Luke 1:68–79

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—
to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“O Lord, How Shall I Meet You”

Hymn 324 vs. 1 - 3

O Lord, how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright?
Your people long to greet you, my hope, my heart’s delight.
O Jesus, let your Word be a lamp to light my way,
to show me how to please you, to guide me ev’ry day.

Love caused your incarnation; love brought you down to me.
Your thirst for my salvation procured my liberty.
Oh, love beyond all telling that led you to embrace
in love, all love excelling, our lost and fallen race!

Rejoice, then, you sad-hearted, who sit in deepest gloom,
who mourn o’er joys departed and tremble at your doom.
Despair not; he is near you, he’s standing at the door
who best can help and cheer you and bids you weep no more.

SERMON

Zephaniah 3:14-17

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Eternal Father, throughout the centuries you repeated and affirmed your promise to send the offspring of the woman to crush the serpent's head. Through your prophets of old, you continually directed the eyes of your people to the advent of their Savior.

We praise you, O Lord, for keeping your promise and sending your Son to destroy the works of the devil.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our King, use your mighty Word to shatter our pride and to rouse us from spiritual slumber and apathy.

Move us to take to heart the words of John: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

You sent your Son to redeem us from sin. Let this good news be our joy and strength. Use it to cheer the lonely, encourage the fearful, and give hope to the despairing. In these days before Christmas, spare us from the stress of deadlines and the frenzy of commercialism.

Fill our lives with the message of your peace and the music of your grace.

Direct our eyes not only to the manger but also to the skies, where we will see your Son coming again, not as a lowly child but as the Lord of lords.

Lift up our hearts in joyful anticipation of that day.

Hold in your care, Lord, those who are experiencing physical and emotional pain and all who are afflicted by disease or facing death. [Especially bless... *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Pour out your compassion on the grieving and comfort the mourners who miss someone they loved.

Move us to pray for these brothers and sisters and to help when we can.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Come quickly, Lord Jesus, in your grace, in your power, and in your glory.
Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

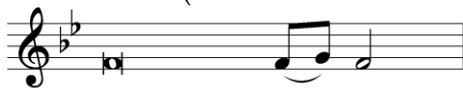
LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)



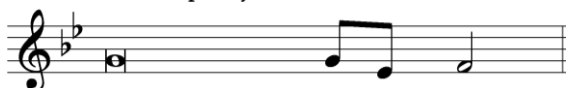
The Lord be with you.



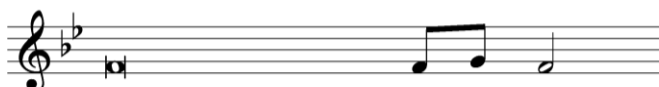
And al - so with you.



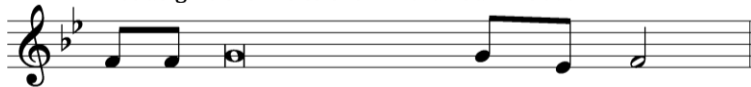
Lift up your hearts.



We lift them up to the Lord.



Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared when he called people to repentance and pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (SUNG)

CW 184

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my (+) body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my (+) blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD (SUNG)

CW 186

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"As Angels Joyed with One Accord"

Hymn 320

As angels joyed with one accord upon the advent of our Lord,
so let us gladly praise the name of him who from the Father came.

He came, not clothed in majesty nor pow'r that suits his deity.
In lowly state he walked till he in dying set us captives free.

This done, he soared to God's right hand,
yet orphaned not his chosen band,
for he, not bound in grace and pow'r, attends his own each day and hour.

In ev'ry age—let praise abound— he comes; we hear his voice resound.
His glorious gospel does not cease to bring us comfort, joy, and peace.

He comes in water to the child and cleanses it, from birth defiled.
This washing seals his pard'ning grace and shows the Father's kindly face.

He comes to us in bread and wine to give himself and gifts divine.
O praise him for this sacrament, redeeming love's great testament!

Lift up your heads! All grief and pain shall vanish when he comes again.
Where we shall see him face to face, there joy alone shall have a place.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you
have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith,
nourished our hope, and strengthened our love.

By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you
will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who
lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates"

Hymn 305 vs. 1-3 vs. 1-3

Lift up your heads, you mighty gates! Behold, the King of glory waits.

The King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here.

Life and salvation he will bring; therefore rejoice and gladly sing.

To God the Father raise your joyful songs of praise.

The King is born in poverty, his chariot is humility,
his kingly crown is holiness, his scepter, pity in distress.
The end of all our woe he brings; therefore the earth is glad and sings.
To Christ the Savior raise your grateful hymns of praise.

How blest the land, the city blest, where Christ the ruler is confessed!
O peaceful hearts and happy homes to whom this King in triumph comes!
The cloudless sun of joy is he who comes to set his people free.
To God the Spirit raise your happy shouts of praise.

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Join Us This Holiday Season!

Advent Wednesdays

December 18

3:30 and 6:30 pm

Advent Dinners at 4:30 pm

Children's Christmas Service

Sunday, December 15 – 3 pm

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - 5 pm

Christmas Day Festival Service - 9 am

New Year's Eve Service/Lord's Supper - 5 pm

Join us for our annual Game Night after the service!

From Your EveryOne Outreach Team -

Be gregarious (thanks, word of the day calendar!) and welcoming to our Christmas guests! Engage them as warmly as you can! Remind them of our days and times of services and invite them to return!