

Leaflet Info

**3rd Sunday of Advent – December 12, 2021**

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**Hymn 615**

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Dismissal

Alleluia! Alleluia! Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

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**The promised day of God**

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**Joyful, joyful, we adore thee**

## Hymns for Advent 3 – December 12, 2021

### Hymn 615 – The Promised Day of God

Thy kingdom come on bended knee the passing ages pray;  
and faithful souls have yearned to see no earth that kingdom's day.

But the slow watches of the night not less to God belong;  
and for the everlasting right the silent stars are strong.

And lo, already on the hills the flags of dawn appear;  
gird up your loins, ye prophet souls, proclaim the day is near:

The day to whose clear shining light all wrong shall stand revealed,  
when justice shall be throned in might, and every hurt be healed;

When knowledge, hand in hand with peace, shall walk the earth abroad;  
the day of perfect righteousness, the promised day of God.

### Canticle 9 – First Song of Isaiah

*Surely it is God who saves me. I will trust in Him and not be afraid.  
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and He will be my Savior.*

Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.  
And on that day you shall say, give thanks to the Lord, and call upon His name.

*Surely it is God who saves me .....*

Make His deeds known among the people. See that they remember that His  
name is exalted.  
Sing the praises of the Lord, for He has done great things, and this is known in all  
the world.

*Surely it is God who saves me .....*

Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, Ring out your joy,  
For the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.

*Surely it is God who saves me .....*

### **Hymn 376 – Joyful, joyful, we adore thee**

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love;  
hearts unfold like flowers before thee, praising thee, their sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;  
giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

All thy works with joy surround thee, earth and heaven reflect thy rays,  
stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise.  
field and forest, vale and mountain, blooming meadow, flashing sea,  
chanting bird and flowing fountain, call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,  
well-spring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!  
Thou our Father, Christ our Brother: all who live in love are thine;  
teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.

**Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea,  
Gibson Island, Maryland, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, December 12, 2021.**

This morning I want to take a look at the author of our first reading this morning, the Prophet Zephaniah (**Zephaniah 3:14-20**).

Like all the prophets, Zephaniah was deeply concerned about the behavior of the Jewish people, his people. They were continually getting themselves in trouble. Some of this trouble was the result of being a small player in the Middle East and therefore subject to the whims of the much larger players in the Middle East.

But most of the trouble for Israel was the result of the people not being loyal to their God. Obedience, not size, not power, was the issue for the prophets. Their job was to call out their fellow Jews for backsliding from their appointed role as representatives of the Lord.

Enter Zephaniah, a pretty interesting fellow. Like many of us, he is a list-maker. But his is not a list of things for us to do. Rather his list details what God does for us. Here are some of the items on Zephaniah's list:

Your god is 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.

Then note that Zephaniah makes God more personal. We move from "he will" to "I – the Lord - will."

I will remove disaster from you.  
I will deal with all your oppressors.  
I will save the lame and gather the outcast.  
I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.  
I will bring you home.  
I will restore your fortunes before your eyes.

Wow. This is an impressive list. And just who benefits from this list? Well, you and I benefit to the point that we want to offer *The First Song of Isaiah*, presented in the insert as *Canticle 9*.

As I hope you just found out, this *Canticle* is incredibly uplifting. It makes one want to echo the words of St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians **(Philippians 4:4-7)**: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”

Note that the meaning of **rejoice** is **joy again – re-joy**, if you will. And not just every year, but every day and every hour of the day. It’s a way of living.

Today’s passage from Luke’s Gospel **(Luke 3:7-18)** offers a different take on rejoicing. It’s a sobering passage about John the Baptist announcing that the Messiah, the Savior, is just around the corner. “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 with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

For John, this proclamation was Good News. Finally, the Messiah had arrived. But not without his winnowing fork. The Good News wasn’t automatic. It was not a Slam Dunk. It, the Good News, came with a price. Jesus would die. But he would do more than die. He would rise. He would live again. And he would give us new life, should we choose to honor his sacrifice.

Zephaniah knew what he was prophesizing about **(Zephaniah 3:20)**. “I will make you renowned and praised among all the people of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.”

It makes you want to sing, doesn’t it? “Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid.”

If you get the sense that this *Canticle* is special to me, you would be right. I have sung this to myself thousands of times in a variety of circumstances. I don’t always remember all the verses, but I do remember **Isaiah, chapter 12, verse 2**: “Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid.”

You probably have a similar – let’s call it a prop – that comforts you in challenging times. It’s a *Canticle* for you, and it always seems to work. It doesn’t get rid of the winnowing fork, but it gives you renewed energy to deal with consequences.

And I have to believe that Zephaniah knew what he was talking about when he promised to bring us home. Isn't "going home" central to us? We have a sense of home, and, if sometimes we feel that we're away from home, we want to get back home. And inevitably we need help in getting there. That's why "Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid" is on the tip of our tongue at all times, but especially when we feel challenged by circumstances that either we have created or that we have become subject to.

Is this Canticle a defense mechanism? Yes, it is. But it is also an offense mechanism, bolstered by centuries of belief by people like ourselves. We are part of a community that recognizes that being alone spiritually is a tough road, and not what the Lord has in mind for us. No, we are part of a Great Choir of believers in the power of the Lord to have our back.

And, as we get more comfortable in the Choir of believers, we look for opportunities to share the comfort. It's not physical comfort, where things seem to make such a difference. Rather it's a strong feeling that we are back home spiritually, where we belong. With the Lord and with one another and with the whole Creation, including billions of people who could profit from enthusiasm and conviction. From today's Epistle (**Philippians 4:4**): "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone."

But let's not confuse gentleness with weakness. In today's Gospel (**Luke 3:16**), John the Baptist makes clear that there is One coming who is going to shake things up. But it's a shake-up with a purpose, namely to welcome people back home where they, where we, belong. This re-uniting is incredibly powerful. "For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior."

Like you, I get excited by all of this. It's a Story for the Ages. And it never gets old. And it never lacks power. And moves us to "Make his deeds known among the peoples; see that they remember that his Name is exalted."

Oh yes, "Surely, it is God who saves me, saves us; and I/we will trust in him and not be afraid." Amen.

## Lessons for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent – December 12, 2021

**Collect:** Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20**

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. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: 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. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcasts, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you to me, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

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

### **Canticle 9: The First Song of Isaiah (Isaiah 12:2-6)**

Surely, it is God who saves me;  
*I will trust in him and not be afraid.*  
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense,  
*and he will be my Savior.*  
Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing  
*from the springs of salvation.*  
And on that day you shall say,  
*give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name;*  
Make his deeds known among the people;  
*see that they remember that his Name is exalted.*  
Sing the praise for the Lord, for he has done great things,  
*and this is known in all the world.*

Cry aloud inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy,  
*for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.*  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
*as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

**Second Reading: 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.

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

**Gospel: Luke 3:7-18**

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." And the crowds asked him, "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." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." 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." As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 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. 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." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

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