

## FIRST READING – C ADVENT 3

A reading from the book of the prophet Zephaniah.

pronounced: Zeff-an-eye-ya

Pause - and look up at the assembly

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.  
The Lord, your God, will exult over you with loud singing  
as on a day of festival.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## SECOND READING – C ADVENT 3

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

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.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – C ADVENT 3

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

The crowds who were gathering to be baptized by John asked him,  
“What then should we do?”

In reply John 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 what into his granary;

but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

So, with many other exhortations,

John proclaimed the good news to the people.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### Reading I: Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Since this is the only occasion in the three-year cycle when a passage from Zephaniah is read, a few words about this minor prophet would be in order.

Zephaniah's prophetic activity coincided with the earlier part of Josiah's reign (ca. 640-630 B.C.). He was probably located at Jerusalem. His prophecies are almost exclusively predictions of judgment.

His message is the same as that of Amos: "The day of YHWH will be darkness and not light."

Today's excerpt comes from the only positive section of the work. It consists of a psalm inviting Zion to rejoice because salvation is at hand. The passage is so out of tune with the general tenor of Zephaniah's work that it has been thought to be an addition by a later editor.

Like last Sunday's passage from Baruch, this reading engenders an attitude of excited expectation for the intervention of YHWH and is therefore fitting for the Advent season.

### Responsorial Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6

This week we depart from the usual practice of drawing upon the psalter for the responsorial reading and instead have an arrangement of the first song of Isaiah. It is uncertain whether this canticle is the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem. In fact, its tone rather suggests a situation at the return from exile.

In the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church, this song is provided as a canticle between the Old and the New Testament readings at the daily Office.

The song gives thanks for the divine salvation that had been promised in the Old Testament and is now on the brink of fulfillment. This makes it equally suitable for Advent.

Note particularly the emphasis on the presence of God in Israel (third stanza and refrain). The incarnation is the supreme realization of the coming of God to be present among his people.

### Reading II: Philippians 4:4-7

If we accept the partition theory of Philippians, this passage will again come from Paul's second letter to the Christians of Philippi (see last Sunday's comments).

This reading was the traditional one for the third Sunday of Advent and gave it the name "Gaudete Sunday." (In the Book of Common Prayer the reading was shifted to the last Sunday of Advent.)

As the caption ("The Lord is near") shows, the focal point of the passage is the statement that the Lord (the exalted Christ) is at hand.

Advent is not a gloomy season (it does have a penitential aspect—see John the Baptist’s message of repentance), despite the traditional use of the same liturgical color as is used for Lent. Rather, Advent is marked by a crescendo of joy.

As the Lord comes nearer and nearer, we become more and more excited. The rhythm of Advent is well captured by the Advent wreath, which starts with one lighted candle and ends with four.

Gospel: Luke 3:10-18

This reading consists of two pericopes (in the form-critical rather than the liturgical sense of the word).

The first (Luke 3:10-14) is called by the Germans (who always seem to have neat names for pericopes) the *Standespredigt* of the Baptist, that is, his preaching to various classes of people: the crowds in general, the tax collectors, and the soldiers.

The second part is the Baptist’s messianic preaching. He disclaims any suggestion that he is the Messiah (see the interpolations in the Johannine prologue). Both Luke and John may reflect the claims of continuing followers of the Baptist; their man, rather than Jesus, was the Messiah. In point of fact, the Baptist had pointed forward to the coming of another, the strong One (“he who is mightier than I”).

Unlike the Baptist, who administers a baptism with water, the strong One will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. John’s baptism is preparatory. The strong One’s baptism will actually mediate the eschatological judgment, or salvation.

Mark had simply “Spirit,” while Matthew and Luke add “fire.” Probably “fire” alone is original and “Spirit” is a Christian addition reflecting the Pentecost event. Yet, the coming of the Spirit was part of Jewish eschatological expectation and was therefore implicit in the Baptist’s words.

Nor can we suppose that in speaking of the strong One the Baptist himself consciously had Jesus in mind; it is more likely that his conception of the Messiah was of one whose function would be more judgmental than salvific.

It has been suggested that this is why later on in prison John asked whether Christ was the coming One or whether people were looking for another. Jesus turned out to be a very different kind of Messiah from what John had expected.

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