



Why should you be Happy?

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CYCLE B

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

GATHERING

(An unlit Advent wreath rests on a table in the gathering place. Pictures of people who are obviously joyful, people of different ages, in different situations (e.g. weddings, celebrations, doing everyday tasks), are arranged around the wreath.)

This week the Scriptures call us to delve more deeply into knowing ourselves and the real cause of our joy. Last week the scriptures invited us to live in a prophetic counter-cultural contrast to the consumeristic spirit of the culture in this season. How have you responded to this invitation during the past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(Three candles on the Advent wreath are lit. The leader invites the community to dwell silently in the awareness of God's presence. After a time of quiet, the leader prays the following prayer; then it is prayed again by all.)

Rorate Caeli

Leader/All: Rain down your dew, you heavens,

and you clouds, rain down the just one.

Earth be opened,
and give birth to the Savior.

From **An Advent Sourcebook**, edited by Thomas J. O’Gorman,
(Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1988), p. 70

(Members join in singing, “Magnificat.” The song may be found on the Internet.

Leader: God of peace,
whose word is good news to the oppressed,
healing for the brokenhearted
and freedom for all who are held bound,
gladden our hearts and fashion the earth
into a garden of righteousness and praise!

Sanctify us entirely, in spirit, soul and body,
for the coming of the One
who even now is among us,
your Son, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

All: Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Prayer for the Third Sunday of Advent, **Prayers for Sundays and Seasons, Year B**, edited by Peter J. Scagnelli, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996), p. 6.

Focus Question

Describe a recent situation that made you happy. What was the cause of your joy? How long did it last?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The Scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly

struck them. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into the conversation.)

Commentary

Anyone who has lived even a few years knows that it is impossible to be happy all the time. Daily tasks, stress, disappointments, misunderstandings with others, just the ups and downs of living, often get in the way of our joy. Ironically, we are surrounded these days with tidings of comfort and joy and with promises of material happiness, even as the pressures of Christmas preparations conspire to wear us out. This Third Sunday of Advent, traditionally called *Gaudete* or *Rejoice* Sunday, is filled with invitations to joy. Why be joyful? All is not well with our world. There's a lot to do in order to bring healing to our world. What is the real cause of our joy?

The people in this week's readings give us clues. The message from the prophet Isaiah, with its promises of glad tidings, liberty, release, favor and vindication, was originally addressed to a people standing in the wreckage of Jerusalem after their return from exile. At first glance, that does not seem to offer much reason for rejoicing. Mary's song, the Magnificat, is the proclamation of a young woman whose reputation is on the line because she agrees to cooperate with God's plan. John the Baptist is living by meager means in the desert as he testifies to the light. What is the cause for joy?

While each of these settings give us pause for thought, each of these people recognize who they are and who God is. Mary admits that she is a lowly servant. John clearly states that he is not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet, but only a voice calling to prepare the way of the Lord. There are no pretensions here. These are people who have their feet on the ground. They are also grounded in the conviction that God is at work. Our God is a faithful God who keeps promises, reverses the misfortunes of the poor, and makes justice spring up. The cause of their joy is what God has done and what God will do.

God is the joy of our souls. St. Paul reminds us that rejoicing is our business; giving thanks is our specialty, not because everything in our lives is wonderful, but because the God who calls us is faithful. The promises of God will be accomplished. If we are convinced of this, then our joy is not simply a fragile happiness that depends on the absence of all difficulties. Real Christian joy, as Teilhard de Chardin has said, is the infallible sign that God is present.

Grounded in the knowledge that we are not the messiah, and grounded in the knowledge that God does great things, we can become partners in God's work of bringing glad tidings to the poor. We who are rooted in the cause of our joy can become the cause of joy for others.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week's scriptures speak to your life or the life of the community, your family or your world these days?
- ◆ When have you been drawn in by a false promise of happiness?
- ◆ Tell about someone you know who has been able to maintain a confident sense of gratitude or joy even in the face of difficulties.
- ◆ When have you ended up in trouble through your attempts to be a messiah or just someone other than who you really are?
- ◆ John was asked, "Who are you?" How would you answer the question if it were put to you? Who are you? Who are you not?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, "What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?" After a few minutes of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Do some pre-Christmas sleuthing. Is there anyone in your neighborhood or your parish community who will be alone for Christmas? Ask a member of your parish staff for guidance. Then, invite someone over for Christmas Day or sometime during Christmas week.
- ◆ Be good news for the poor. Ask a family member or friend to make a contribution in your name instead of buying you a Christmas gift to an area shelter or some other appropriate group.
- ◆ Still looking for ways to simplify your approach to Christmas? Check out the alternatives at the Simple Living web site at www.simpleliving.org/catalog/Christmas).

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to reflect on the causes of joy in their lives, on some ways God has been at work in their lives. While the community pauses, a selection of instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, the leader invites members to name prayerfully some cause for joy, some way God is acting in their lives. To each person's offering, the community responds, "Our spirits rejoice in God, our Savior!" When this sharing is complete, members join in praying the Lord's Prayer.)

Leader: May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy,
 and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body,
 be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

All: Amen. Come, Lord, Jesus!

(Members exchange the sign of peace.)

