

# Advent 3



## Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you once called John the Baptist to give witness to the coming of your Son and to prepare his way. Grant us, your people, the wisdom to see your purpose today and the openness to hear your will, that we may witness to Christ's coming and so prepare his way; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

This prayer is designated as "new" in the "Sources of Prayers in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*."

Or

Lord, hear our prayers and come to us, bringing light into the darkness of our hearts; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The prayer is based on an ancient Latin prayer which, in typical style, "compressed spiritual thought of large significance in clear and terse phrase." The contemporary form of this prayer has lost much of the power and beauty of the Prayer Book translation: "give ear to our prayers, and lighten the darkness of our hearts by thy gracious visitation." [1]

## Zephaniah 3:14-20

{14} Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! {15} 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. {16} On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. {17} 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 {18} as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. {19} I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. {20} At that time I will bring you home, 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.

15. *The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst*: Israel had been a monarchy for three hundred years, but there was still a sense that the human king on the throne was only a figure of the true king of Judah, the Lord himself.

16. *that day*: This is the day of Yahweh, the day of judgment and the day of victory.

**Comment:** Zephaniah 3 was written between 612 and 609 b.c.. 3:14-20 offers deliverance and restoration in place of judgment and desolation. In 14-17 the people are exhorted to rejoice and exult because the Lord has withdrawn his judgments and given the victory to his people. Verses 18-20 promise of restoration of honor and fortune before the nations. The catch-word "rejoice" is the point of connection with the second lesson.

## Isaiah 12:2-6

{2} Surely 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. {3} With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. {4} And 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. {5} Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. {6} Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in

your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

2. *God is my salvation*: Salvation may be sought and may come from a variety of sources, but the prophet confesses that *his* salvation is from God, who is his strength and might. He will not be afraid.

3. *water from the wells of salvation*: This may be a reference to a water procession during the Feast of Tabernacles referred to in the tractate Sukkah in the Babylonian Talmud.

4. *that day*: As in the first lesson, the day of Yahweh's judgment, and for Judah, the day of salvation.

6. *the Holy One of Israel*: This is another descriptive name for the God of Judah. The title is used in a prophecy of Isaiah ben Amoz in 2 Kings 19:22 to specify the God whom Judah and Jerusalem have mocked and reviled. Here it is used to characterize the power of Yahweh in whom Zion and Israel find their salvation.

**Comment:** The "Psalm" for Advent 3 this year is Isaiah 12:2-6, an eschatological hymn of praise written during the time of the Second Temple. The psalm responds with praise and joy to the Lord who promised restoration in the first lesson. The people are called on to give thanks to him and to sing his praises.

### **Philippians 4:4-7**

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

7. *the peace of God*: "Peace does not describe a rosy, turmoil-free, ideal state. It is not the absence of trouble or strife. Paul was not in such a state (1:20-26). But God's peace describes the power of God's presence in every moment, even and especially those fraught with pain and suffering. Peace is the presence of hope and comfort in knowing that the Lord is at hand in every time and place." [2]

### **Luke 3:7-18**

{7} 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? {8} 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. {9} 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." {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.

7. *brood of vipers*: In Isaiah 59:5 the metaphor of the spider's web describes the actions of the unrighteous.

8. *Bear fruits worthy of repentance*: John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is a transformation of life. Baptism does not produce forgiveness; it produces repentance which is the evidence of transformation, and forgiveness is the fruit of that transformation.

*We have Abraham as our ancestor*: Luke also sees reliance of descent from Abraham not to

be effective in Luke 16:19-31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

*16: He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire:* Fire is used frequently in the Old Testament to indicate purification from sin (Isaiah 1:25; 4:4; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 3:13). John draws a distinction between his baptism with water as a sign of repentance and the baptism of the one who is coming which will fill the baptized with the Holy Spirit and purification.

## Reflection

Punishment and deliverance, despair and hope, defeat and victory, all these are in the hand of God. And God has done everything possible to ensure that joy and restoration are the lot of his people. John's call to repentance is a call to become a part of that joy and restoration. Repentance is not a condition, but a change of direction in life and purpose necessary to accept the gifts of forgiveness and peace. Advent has moved from the coming of God in judgment, to the coming of John with a message of repentance, to John's prophecy of the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. The last Advent Sunday will focus our attention directly on the birth of Jesus to do the will of God.

## Hymns [3]

*With One Voice* (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

553 --E--Rejoice, O Pilgrim

37 --D--Hark! A Thrilling

25 --I--Rejoice, Rejoice,

635v --I/P--Surely It Is God (809s)

772v --I--O Lord, Hear My (793s)

299, 23, 36, 30, 409, 26

## Prayers of the People [4]

P or A: With hearts full of gladness, we celebrate the wonder of our God who turns tears into laughter and mourning into dancing. We pray, "We rejoice in your coming, O Lord," and respond, "**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**"

A: For the whole church, that we may learn to welcome strangers into our community with open arms, especially those often refused meaningful participation in society: the poor, the criminal, and those scorned for their lifestyle. We remember that Christ welcomes us in our moments of greatest weakness. We rejoice in your coming, O Lord, **Amen. Come...**

A: For the nations, that the quest for peace may replace the pursuit of power as a way of life, and that your church may serve as a model of peaceful community. We rejoice in your coming, O Lord. **Amen. Come...**

A: For all those who suffer from a heavy heart or a troubled conscience, that they may find peace in prayer, knowing that you, O God, patiently receive every request and concern. We rejoice in your coming, O Lord. **Amen. Come...**

A: For music directors and choirs, and for all who add voice or instrument to worship services, that they may be inspired in this time of rejoicing to offer their time and gifts to glorify you. We rejoice in your coming, O Lord. **Amen. Come...**

A: For the sick and the dying, that you would grant them comfort and protection. Move us to visit and pray with these, your servants, that they may not be alone in their suffering. We pray especially for \_\_\_\_\_, and all those whom we name in our hearts. We rejoice in your coming, O Lord. **Amen. Come...**

P: We celebrate our God who welcomes strangers to his banqueting table, who transforms war into peace, and who turns grief into great joy. We rejoice that the kingdom of our compassionate Lord is at hand. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Or [5]

*Presider or deacon*

As we wait for Christ to come in victory, let us offer prayers to God who saves the lame and gathers the outcast.

*Deacon or other leader*

For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ.

For *N* our bishop and all bishops, for the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority.

For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for those in prison.

For the dying and the dead.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Joining our voices with the blessed Virgin Mary and with all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

**To you, O Lord.**

*Presider*

O King of all the nations, only joy of every heart, keystone of the mighty arch who makes us one, come and save the creature you fashioned from clay. Glory to you for ever.

**Notes**

[1] Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947, p.468.

[2] Thomas S. Hanson, Shane M.J. Groth, Lori L.J. Rosenkvist, Tommi-Riva Numbala (editors), *Exploring the Yearly Lectionary: Studies in the Series C Bible Texts*. Augsburg Fortress, 1991, p. 13.

[3] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[4] [http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter\\_c.txt](http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt)

[5] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>