

Sing True Advent Joy

✧ In God's forgiving grace (vv.14-15)

✧ In God's great delight (vv.16-17)

In the name of Christ our Advent King, dear rejoicing believers:

Giving Chapel at Saint John Lutheran School in St. Paul this week, I was glad to find that the little kids know something most people miss. They knew that **Advent** means *coming*. The first and second graders were very clear about Jesus *coming* the first time to be born of the Virgin Mary. And they knew that Jesus is still *coming* to us in His Word. They are looking forward to Judgment Day because Jesus *will come* once more to take all His family of believers home to heaven. Kids get what grownups can't.

Advent means shopping to most – or the biggest profits of the year. Christmas music puts us in the mood. “Black Friday” and “Cyber Monday” stimulate credit cards. “Giving Tuesday” adds charitable gifts for others. Meanwhile, we're losing focus on the real reason for the season: Christ's *coming*. Our spirits grow cold and careless. Living in Sodom and Gomorrah wears you down. Pornography isn't so shocking anymore. Swearing sounds normal. So how can we **Sing True Advent Joy**?

✧ In God's forgiving grace (vv.14-15)

At first these delightful verses from Zephaniah find most people yawning. If you're not very musical or don't like singing, you might prefer some exciting battle scenes from Joshua or Judges and the Kings. But that's because most of us have not read the first three chapters of Zephaniah.

Zephaniah is a Minor Prophet with a major message. He was a great grandson of good King Hezekiah and a cousin of Judah's last good King Josiah. Most likely Jeremiah was a young prophet who also helped support King Josiah in his reforms. But the warnings we read about Christ's **Advent** had to be sharp to cut through the complacent, cold, hard hearted attitude of God's people. Sound familiar?

Here's a sampling: *“I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD. “I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth,” declares the LORD.* (Zephaniah 1:2f NIV84 – all quotes) But long before Judgment Day there will be little Judgment Days for religious folks who mix truth with error and don't care about God. They are “lukewarm” like Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22). They *“neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him.”* (1:6)

“The great day of the LORD is near – near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth.” (1:14-18)

Zephaniah points to powerful Philistine cities that crumbled into dust. Nineveh, the cruel, “carefree” capital of Assyria in modern Iraq, became a place for *“flocks and herds [to] lie down”* for *“the desert owl and the screech owl [to] roost on her columns,”* a rubble covered echo chamber. **Advent** always comes in wrath and terror for the enemies of God.

So how often have we failed to obey or refused correction? Have our worries proved how little we really trust in the LORD? Do we prefer arrogant preachers spouting their own opinions in “relevant,” “inspiring” sermons? Or do we follow the LORD, convinced He *“is righteous...does no wrong...dispenses justice morning by morning ...in every new day does not fail...”* ?

Some of us like caramel candy covered with dark chocolate and little sea salt. And you get a few sweet words from Zephaniah covered with a lot of salt until about the middle of chapter 3. Just before our text it starts to come clear that all this destruction is the last thing God wants. He’s like a homeowner who has to bulldoze his house because of storm damage or destructive mold. If we will just listen and take His Word to heart, He is eager to give us **Advent Joy In God’s forgiving grace**. God reserves for Himself a *“remnant”* of believers in every age whose lips He purifies for prayer and praise, whose hands He strengthens to *“serve him shoulder to shoulder”* (3:9), who bring Him offerings with grateful hearts.

To these *“meek and humble”* worshipers who *“trust in the name of the LORD”* the inspired prophet Zephaniah speaks our text. This is for us who are convinced of our sins and confess Christ as our Lord and Savior: *“Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of 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.”*

It would be 600 years before Jesus’ coming to die and rise again. Yet God promised, so it was as good as done. Zephaniah speaks in the past tense like Isaiah who said of Jesus, *“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”* (53:5) Our Savior is God is not only *“with you,”* He is literally *“in you”* by your Baptism for life, by His Word in your heart and His Holy Supper deep down in your soul to give you good health and holy joy from the inside out. What can you do but *sing* and *shout*?

☆ In God’s great delight (vv.16-17)

The last two verses of this text are almost too big to grasp. They’re not hard to understand, especially verse 16. Sometimes you get so discouraged you want to throw up your hands: “What’s the use?” Or more sitcom-esque: “Just shoot me!” Other times you don’t even have enough energy for that, so your hands just hang down limp and lifeless. But Zephaniah could see **Advent coming**. God’s Day of Judgment for evil unbelievers is also God’s Day of Vindication for repentant-forgiven sinners sanctified by God. Remember this one? *“You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”* Because Jesus did come to live and die and live again for us all, His holy Apostle Paul could write: *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”* (1 Corinthians 6:11; 15:58 NIV84) So *“Do not fear,”* people of God, *“do not let your hands hang limp.”*

Our last verse 17 boggles my mind: *“The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”* We sing *“the LORD [our] God”* with us, “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel.” *“He is [so] mighty to save”* that He destroyed sin by dying for it, destroyed death by rising from it, destroyed hell by marching through it in His triumphant descent on Easter morning. But have you ever thought how God *“will take great delight in you”*? “Me, Pastor, really me? I’m such a sinner. I’m not sure I even belong in church!” You can be sure sinners do belong here in God’s house, learning to **Sing True Advent Joy**. Here our gracious God *“will quiet you with his love”* so that you can go home once again with *“the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, that guards your heart and mind through faith in Christ Jesus.”*

Do you wish to be home in heaven? God wants you there too. When we get home God will be as happy as we are. *“He will rejoice over you with singing.”* Like a mother with a newborn baby, God will be singing about you. Pick up the tunes. Christ is coming! **Sing True Advent Joy**. Amen.