

3 Advent, Year B  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
December 17, 2023  
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

Isaiah 61.1-4,8-11

Canticle 15 1 Thess 5.16-24

John 1.6-8,19-28

Mary said “yes” to the angel Gabriel, a messenger of God. “Here am I, she said, “the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Mary said yes to a dangerous, ostracizing, fear-filled journey of waiting for her son, our Lord. I wonder, if we were ancient God-bearers, if we would say “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord!” She could have been abandoned by Joseph, her betrothed, and stoned to death. She might not have traveled to Bethlehem at such a dangerous time, so close to the birth of her son. She was not welcomed there; there was “no room” in the usual places. Could we sing with her: “My spirit rejoices?”

Two thousand years later, joining Mary in rejoicing, in joy, is exactly what we are called to do. We join in voices of worship of long ago and of today that begin worship with the word *rejoice*. Rejoice! Today is the Advent day for us to set aside whatever we are feeling: frenzied, overwrought, organized – or not, lonely, or like a champion because we found the last one of the “must have” gift for a loved one. However you feel today – stop. Stop, take a deep breath, and another, and say “rejoice.” Light the rose – pink! – candle on your Advent wreath, or gaze on the one you see here today, and remember what and who it is we are waiting for: Jesus, the light of the world. Step away from the “stuff” for at least a few minutes today and think about the savior given to a complicated, dangerous world. With God-bearer Mary, rejoice.

It is not only Mary who rejoices today. Listen to Isaiah! Isaiah writes about who he was called to be in the world: sent. Sent  
to **bring** good news to the oppressed,  
to **bind up** the brokenhearted,  
to **proclaim** liberty to the captives,  
and **release** to the prisoners;

We notice that God takes part in Isaiah’s proclamation to the world:  
For I the Lord love justice,  
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;  
I will faithfully give them their recompense,  
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Paul joins today’s message of joy. In the face of opposition and persecution which we remember that Paul himself had done, Paul writes: rejoice.

Do you have time to rejoice today? My friends, we *must* rejoice today with Mary, Paul, Luke, and with one another. We are all God-bearers in this world, and the world as we find it has never been safe, never been easy – and never without the light of Christ since his birth. Isaiah’s words about his message from God foretold the one that God anointed, the one in whom God’s Spirit again comes to life. In Luke Chapter 4, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61, telling us that in himself Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled. In a rough chronological order, we hear “rejoice in the Lord” from Isaiah, Paul, Luke, and John – and that’s just this morning!

How, then, do we bear Christ right now? As God-bearers, light the candle of rejoicing in your heart today. Be steadfast in its light and the certainty that it portrays. Yes, certainty. We rejoice not only in hope but in the

knowledge that Jesus was born, lives now, and will come again. Rejoice. Pray without ceasing. Prepare for Jesus by bearing Advent light.

We know that waiting is hard in every season, at every age, in every era. A reflection from “Working Preacher” states: For centuries, Christians have waited for the second “Advent” of their lord. [We] give liturgical voice to this longing in the weeks leading up to Christmas. And Advent is also a season of sighing: Celebrating Christ’s first Advent is fine, but what about the second Advent? Where is our Lord? Where is God while disease, poverty, violence, and hunger afflict creation? “Amen” to the promises of God in Isaiah, Luke, Paul, and John – “amen, and where are you God? ...”

Living into Advent is seeing the light of Christ grow each day and each week. Christ is here. Jesus is coming. Christ will come again. Advent is about waiting in the hope that He who came will come again, as a baby and as our Savior; as an infant, and as our Lord. It is counter cultural to wait in this hope and knowledge, counter cultural to be so brave as to find joy in all things: in long lines and weary faces, in a holiday rushed and in respite that is hard to find. We must find joy in spite of whatever is going on around us; that is the peace of Christ with which we greet each other each week. It is counter cultural to come here to wait and to worship. It is also life-giving, life-saving, hope- and God-bearing to both carry and announce this light of Christ.

There are some practical ways to live into a life that rejoices, prays, and gives thanks in everything. Give up. Give up:

Swiping your credit cards on a daily or even hourly basis.

Give up expecting yourself to obtain every perfect gift for your family, friends, and colleagues. You are enough.

Give up thinking that you are **not** enough. You are.

Give up expecting yourself to equate joy with happiness. Life is hard. We’ve lost loved ones, and maybe we’re still deep in grief. Life is never the same as it was “before” – before someone died, before we fought an illness, before the kids were born, before they grew up, before we met Jesus.

And the gift of the birth of Jesus is, in fact, everything.

Because you’ve met Jesus, been washed in his baptism, take within ourselves his body and blood, and today bathe in his growing light, give up:

We are alive, bearers of Christ’s light, God’s beloved children.

From Bishop Daniel:

Advent calls me to attention, wakefulness. In a culture based on rumor and one-sided information, turning even formerly trusted sources into gossips, we are called to truth. Advent calls me to hope. Hope is not optimism in the face of evidence. It is a discipline of seeing God at work where it is not obvious to others and trusting that God is at work when you cannot see it yourself. “We do not hope for what is seen. What is seen is not hope. But we hope for what we do not see.”

In the language of the Reign of God, hope for humanity is seeing human beings in the light of their potential as children of God. We are born as children of Adam and Eve, but we are reborn in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as the children of God.

We are not reborn as God’s children to that end alone; we are reborn to grow into heirs who can act in the world for God’s Reign, bringing light and peace and hope fulfilled here in our time. Advent reminds us that eventually all we work for will come to fullness in the return of God’s Son, when He shall be our Light, and Peace shall reign finally. And the hopes we offer in small gifts will be given to every human being who will receive Him.

So I hope, and I put my phone away to attend again to this woman great with child, a fact beyond all rumor, who comes to bring the Light of God to the world. So light your lamps for the long nights ahead, and I will see you along the Way.