

## The 3rd Sunday of Advent. (Luke 3:10-18)

Rejoice ! This is Gaudete Sunday ! The word means Rejoice ! The basis for rejoicing is the nearness of the Lord. All 3 readings carry this same theme Rejoice !

The 1st. Reading the Prophet Zephaniah, writing in the seventh century B.C., tells Jerusalem to Rejoice-because Salvation is near..... God stands in her midst and will deliver her from her enemies ! God is also portrayed, not only as a king and warrior, but as a loving bridegroom, who steadfastly loves his unworthy and unfaithful bride.

How important is that thought ..... He loves his 'unworthy and unfaithful bride' ! We will come back to that. The 2nd reading is even more emphatic ....Paul calls on the Philippians to rejoice because the Lord is near. (Paul I am pretty sure, was thinking of the Second Coming, which he believed was near.) Paul says 'if you need anything (now notice it is not if you want .... but if you need) 'make your requests known to God.' "Then the Peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

The Gospel contains the same theme .... The nearness of the Lord. People are begging John to know 'What must we do to be Prepared ! Now the people were 'filled with expectation'. Are you filled with expectation ? Or are you filled with Fear ?

John the Baptist was really a pretty extraordinary man, a very practical man. He had a great grasp of his mission in the world, and despite his peculiarities, he never seemed to lose sight of his mission. He was clear that his mission in the world was to introduce The Savior. The Christ, "I am baptizing you with water,

but one mightier than I is coming..... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Once he completes this mission of introducing Jesus, he fades into the background ..... no more about him until his death ... Beheaded by Herod ! So, John’s life was complete, a horrifying ending ..... but what about his mission....Was it complete? Certainly not ! It had only just begun.

He was here to pave the way for the Christ, who would ‘baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire’! It begs the question that is clear throughout the whole ministry of Jesus! Have you received that Baptism of The Holy Spirit ..... that fire! We see the powerful affect it had on the Apostles when they received it at Pentecost ..... Those ordinary men, called by Jesus, who were stumbling, mumbling, and bumbling, .....now they become men of courage, wisdom, understanding, men with a mission, a desire to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is directly traceable back to them that we are here today! Rejoice .... they proclaimed the message that was passed on to us, and which we are charged with passing on to an up-coming generation ! How are we doing ? Really ..... How do you think we are doing ?

It becomes clear that it worked for the Apostles because of that special gift He gave them..... ‘The Gift of the Holy Spirit’! I am pretty sure that we are not going to be able to continue this work effectively, without that same gift. So .....how do we receive that gift .... we have first got to have an openness and a longing to receive that gift.

However a lot of people appear to have a fear or worry about receiving that gift ! Naturally there are all of those questions that arise in ones mind about, “How will I look ? How will I act, Will it be different ? What will be expected of me (that’s a big one) .... don't

we all possess that great fear ..... If God gives me a Special gift ..... what expectations is He going to have of me ? Will I be able to measure up to those expectations ?

They are very real and valuable questions and certainly worthy of our attention. I am quite sure that many of those questions arise from our real lack of understanding of the God we believe in. I have reflected on that issue for the passed two weeks — images of God, that have been passed along to us and while we may not be sure of whether we believe them or not, it can become very difficult for us to Trust Him and to Trust his promises ! As I said these past two weeks, we might need to clean out our storehouse of things we believe about god and start afresh.

This week I would like you to reflect on two things :  
Is your God a Wrathful God ? A lot of our teaching is about the Wrath of God ! John the Baptist talked about it.

When he observed Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath” ? He asked them. How do you reconcile the coming of our God as an “infant Babe” with a wrathful God ? There has got to be nothing less wrathful than an Infant Babe ? Behold our God !

Many Images of God appear to be just like a glorified Santa Claus ..... He’s making a list ... checking it twice, going to find out whose naughty or nice ..... Who is your God ? What do you really trust and believe ? It makes all the difference in the world !

The second question I would like for you to reflect on this week is regarding the birth of this Infant .... Our God ! Look at where He

was born ... a stable .... placed in a feeding trough for cattle ? Was that all part of the plan or just some weird coincidence ?  
Is it possible that He Chose to be born in a Stable ? Could it possibly be that He choose to be born in a stable because He wanted to make it very clear to us where He wanted to be born in each of us ?

Could it be ? Could Jesus Christ really want to be born in my stable ..... that stinky place in me where I hide all my trash all my refuse ? How willing are you to allow him to be born in your stable this Christmas ? Why not try it out at our at our Reconciliation Service on Monday night ?

— Fr. Gerry Hurley