

“Enjoy The Joy”

The Gospel Lesson for today is read from Luke 3:7-18

Hear the words from the disciple Luke:

Read Luke 3:7-18

“The Word of God for the people of God.”

“Thanks be to God”

Let us pray:

Lord, by Your grace may I be given Your words to proclaim without fear. As we prepare for the arrival of Your Son, Jesus Christ, prepare our hearts to receive him. Intercede my words by Your Holy Spirit and give them life – in the same way You gave life to Your Son in the Incarnation.

May Your Word and my words be one in the same. Use them to bring the good news, the joyous truth to Your people that Your Son, Immanuel, has come for us, and will never leave us. In Jesus Christ’s holy name, Amen.

Intro:

Today is traditionally called “Gaudete” (**Gow-day-tay**) or “**Rejoice**” Sunday.”

“**Gaudete in Domino semper,**” St. Paul writes in his letter to the Phillipians. “**Rejoice in the Lord always.**” Yet, our gospel text for today seems to be not so cheerful on Rejoice Sunday.

"You brood of vipers!" John the Baptist shouts across the wilderness in the Gospel of Luke. **"Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance."**

The fact that these **harsh words** belong to Advent is both **remarkable** and **refreshing**. I don't know about you, but I don't get called a **"viper"** very often, and I have to confess: **something in me perks up**. At last! Hard words for hard lives. **Nothing sugar-coated** about

“Enjoy The Joy”

this, nothing I might send in a **Hallmark** card or stuff into a **giftbox**. “You brood of vipers!”

Repent. Bear fruit. Wake UP. Genuine repentance produces fruits. Then he says,

3:9 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."

John is saying here that Christ's coming would test the reality of their/our repentance.

What is more is that according to Luke, for whatever reason, **great crowds stream** into the desert to get yelled at by John. Why? **Why** are they **willing** — no, **eager** — to hear his **fire-and-brimstone preaching**? What attracts them?

It lies in the question they ask John at the conclusion of his sermon. "What should we do?" and in John's answer to them.

What should we do?" is not necessarily a question people ask when things are going well. It's the question we ask when we've come to the ends of ourselves. When the received wisdom has failed, when our cherished defenses are down, when our lives are splitting at the seams. It's what we ask when we're weary, bored, disillusioned, or desperate. "What should we do?"

So here's the challenge: **is this a question we're asking during this Advent season?** As we wait in the darkness, as we look forward with hope to the coming of the Messiah, are we engaging in the kind of robust self-reflection that leads to action? Or are we self-righteous, complacent, and lethargic? Are we flocking, like the crowds in John's story, towards genuine repentance? Or are we turning away, offended that repentance has a place in the Christmas story?

If we're ready to be prepared, if we're ready to truly repent, then let's ask the question...

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WHAT MUST WE DO TO BEAR FRUIT WORTHY OF REPENTANCE?

Have you heard: [it is better to give than to receive]

3:10 And **the crowds** asked him, "What then should we do?"

3:11 In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

Have you heard: [sharing is caring]

In other words = GIVE! (#1 FRUIT)

3:12 Even **tax collectors** came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?"

3:13 He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."

In other words = DON'T TAKE! (#2 FRUIT)

3:14 **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.**"

In other words = BE SATISFIED W/ WHAT YOU'RE GIVEN! (#3 FRUIT)

GIVE, DON'T TAKE, AND BE SATISFIED = FORMULA FOR JOY

Maybe this is how we enjoy the gift of joy – repent and then bear the fruit, bring it forth. But also, bear it — carry it, shoulder it, endure it til Kingdom Come. These things:

GIVE, DON'T TAKE, AND BE SATISFIED is our evidence that our hearts are truly right and ready before God.