

Third Sunday in Advent/December 16, 2018
Luke 7:18-35/Repentance Brings Rejoicing
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
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“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

This Third Sunday in Advent brings a change to the middle of the season. Advent provides an opportunity for us to examine and repent of our sins by way of preparation for the glorious forgiveness we have in Jesus Christ, the forgiveness we celebrate when we consider God loved us enough to take on a human nature and then die to take away our sins. The early church fathers realized it was important to take a break during this season of penitential preparation. They set aside the middle Sunday as a day for rejoicing. While Advent remembers the eager anticipation of the Old Testament Christians, we also remember, for us, Christ has already come. We rejoice we already have the savior God promised to His people of old.

The color of the candle for this day recalls the theme of rejoicing in the midst of repentance. It is a time to remember how God fulfilled His promises. It is a time to rejoice.

As we read today’s Gospel, we discover there were some people who did not rejoice at the presence of the savior. Today’s Gospel states, “The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by [John].” These people were not ready. They had refused John’s baptism.

Last week’s Gospel taught us John’s ministry included a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John’s ministry also included some pretty straight talk about sin. He told the people they were children of the devil and destined for eternal flames. He called them to repent of their sins. That repentance prepared them for the

forgiveness Jesus would offer. John prepared the way for the savior from sin by proclaiming the people's sin so they knew they needed a savior.

The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected John's ministry. They rejected his message and they rejected his baptism. They saw themselves as already righteous. They refused to admit they were sinners. When the savior came, they were not ready. They could not rejoice.

John's preaching was harsh, but it did what it was supposed to do. It prepared people for Jesus. Today's Gospel states, "When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John." These people were ready. They were prepared. Because John proclaimed their sin to them, they saw themselves as sinners. They saw their need for a savior. They were ready. They rejoiced at the coming of the savior who would rescue them from their sin.

Today's gospel tells us Jesus fulfilled the signs of the promised Messiah. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. Jesus healed them physically and then gave them the good news. Just as He can give physical healing, He can also give spiritual healing. He forgave their sins. That is a true reason to rejoice.

Even John, who is now in jail, has a reason to rejoice. When his disciples return and tell him all they have seen and heard, John can rejoice in the sure and certain knowledge the savior is at work in the world. Jesus began the work that will save us from our sins.

Paul was also in jail when the Holy Spirit inspired him to dictate the words of today's epistle, the words that give this Sunday its name, Gaudete, Latin for rejoice: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." For those who truly understand they are sinners, the news of the savior from sin is a reason to rejoice; even in prison.

The people in today's Gospel had a reason to rejoice. They were personal witnesses of their savior's ministry. Jesus healed them and taught them. They could feel his touch. These are all reasons to rejoice and declare God just. Even so, we have an even greater reason to rejoice.

Jesus said, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." What can Jesus mean by this? If no one is greater than John, how can the least be greater than he? How can the least be greater than the greatest? Jesus Himself gave the answer to that question. [Luke 10:23-24] He said ... "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." John was the last Old Testament prophet. God's words came out of his mouth and he was blessed to see the coming of Messiah, but he did not live long enough to see the end of Messiah's mission on this earth. Just as Moses stood on the mountain and saw the Promised Land, but never experienced it, so too John looked into the future and saw the kingdom of heaven, but never experienced it before his death. John joined the great heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 about whom it was said, [Heb 11:39-40] "All these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect."

So it is, while none of us will be the prophet John was, we are all greater than John because we have history of our Savior in ink on paper. John declared Jesus is God's perfect Passover lamb, but we have the history that tells us how Jesus is that lamb. We know Jesus lived a perfect life. We know through Baptism He gives us perfect life and takes all our sins, all our doubts onto Himself. We know through the instrument of Pontius Pilate, Jesus received the punishment we earned with our doubts and other sins. We know through His death, Jesus conquered all our sins. We know through His resurrection, Jesus leads us to eternal life with Him. We experience Christ's baptism of Spirit and fire. We know the intimacy of Jesus' presence within us as we eat His body and drink His blood in the Sacrament of the altar. John saw all these things as a prophet, but did not experience them in this life. We experience them now and so have the greater blessing from God. We have an even greater reason to rejoice.

During this Advent season of penitential preparation, we consider our sin. As we consider our sin, its consequences and punishment should terrify us. How wonderful it is, then, to have the oasis of Gaudete or Rejoice Sunday in the middle of this season. On this Sunday we learn our sorrow over sin becomes rejoicing over our savior and His salvation. We rejoice the Son of God came into this world to offer Himself up as our substitute and take away our sins. We rejoice by His resurrection He has opened heaven for us. We rejoice that, although our sin is great, our savior is even greater.

May this season of Advent and this Sunday of rejoicing prepare you so when Jesus says, [Rev 22:20] "Surely I am coming soon," you can join God's people and reply, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Sola Gloria Deo! Glory to God alone!