

Here's a text if you've only a minute ...

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.
Indeed, the Lord is near.

Entrance Antiphon

The Lord your God is in your midst.

First Reading

Be strong and do not fear.

Behold our God will come and he will save us.

Communion Antiphon

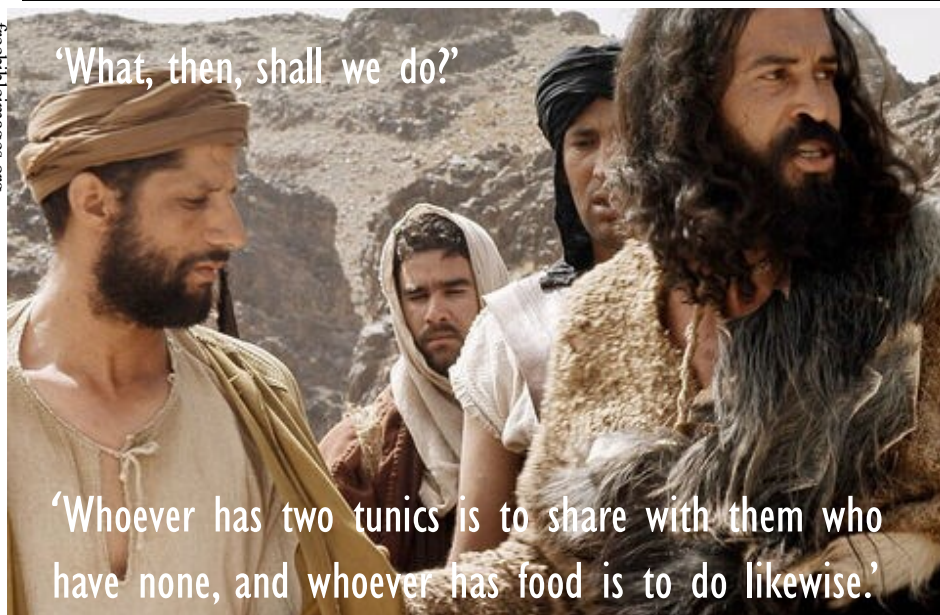
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
ever faithful to your promises and ever close to your Church:
the earth rejoices in hope of the Saviour's coming
and looks forward with longing to his return at the end of time.

Prepare our hearts and remove the sadness
that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope
that his presence will bestow.

Old Opening Prayer

This week's texts if you'd like to reflect further:
Zephaniah 3: 14–18; Isaiah 12; Philippians 4:4–7; Luke 3:10–18

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ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

Rejoice

Third Sunday of Advent
Year C, 15th December 2024

'What, then, shall we do?'

This *Gaudete* Sunday begins with a resounding 'Rejoice!': a joyful and energising call for jubilation that echoes throughout the readings. We are full of joy in the Lord because he is very near. Our Advent journeying and anticipation is nearly over. We are preparing to celebrate both the coming of the Christ Child into our world, and the wonderful promise of the Good News that God is always close at hand.

The prophet Zephaniah (**First Reading**) proclaims a jubilant God already in our midst: a God who saves, strengthens, calms and protects us with love; a God who dances and sings alongside us.

This joyful image of God is so fundamental to our Advent hope and longing that a responsorial prayer from the prophet Isaiah replaces the **Psalm**, encouraging us to: '*Shout aloud and sing praise, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!*'

Paul's letter to the Philippians (**Second Reading**) opens by encouraging us always to be joyful in the Lord. Through prayers of thanksgiving, we will come to know the true peace that rests in Christ Jesus.

John the Baptist (**Gospel**) was grounded in his certain belief of the coming saviour who would bring, joy, peace and justice. He dedicated his life to calling people to repentance, so that they might be better able to respond and believe in the Good News. John was so rooted in Gospel values that many thought he himself was the Christ.

Let us pray this week for the grace to be like John, to proclaim Christ and the joyous Good News to a world that desperately needs it.

As a community of prayer, we know we are loved by a joyful God.

With that same joy, let us share this love with others.



Opening Prayer

O God, who see how your people
faithfully await the feast of the Lord's Nativity,
enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation
and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.

Second Reading Philippians 4:4–7

Brothers and sisters:
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.
Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.
The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything,
but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

During this Advent season, I might begin my prayer by lighting a candle or focusing my attention on an Advent wreath or sacred image. Remembering that God is very close to me, I take my time to slowly let go of any worries, and gradually become still before the Lord.

I prayerfully read through this short text several times, pausing by words and phrases that the Spirit guides me to notice.

I might try to imagine that St Paul wrote this letter to my own faith community. How would we respond to his encouragement and guidance?

Are we a joyful, welcoming community?

Do we express tolerance and reasonableness to each other and to strangers in our midst?

Are we a community of prayer?

Perhaps I read the letter again, as if it is written to me by a dear friend.

'[My name]: Rejoice in the Lord always ... The Lord is at hand [my name], do not be anxious about anything.'

In what way does this alter my prayerful reflections?

Are there challenges in my life which make it difficult for me to express joy or feel joy this Advent?

Maybe what I need at the moment is to simply rest in the presence of my loving God, and feel the peace of heart and mind that *surpasses all understanding*.

I bring my prayer to a close with the same care and attention with which I entered this time with the Lord. I finish by making a prayerful sign of the cross.

It may deepen my prayer to keep returning to this letter throughout the coming week.

Gospel Luke 3: 10–18

At that time: The crowds asked John, 'What, then, shall we do?' And he answered them, 'Whoever has two tunics is to share with those who have none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.' Tax collectors also came to be baptised and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than you are authorized to do.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.'

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, 'I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.' So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

I take a few moments to prepare myself to become still before the Lord in a way that suits me best today. When I feel ready to pray, I slowly read this passage as many times as I need to become more familiar with the unfolding scene. If my attention rests on some particular words or interactions, I allow that to become a focus of my prayer.

Perhaps I use my imagination to picture John on the banks of the River Jordan, surrounded by all the people who are drawn to hear his message.

They are full of anticipation: many of them think he is the coming Christ.

What does John look, sound like and say, that makes them think this?

I watch the tax collectors and soldiers ask, '*What then shall we do?*'

I listen to John's answer. Am I able to do as he commands?

How am I being called to act with compassion and justice?

I then place myself in the scene and ask John the same question.

What then shall I do?

In what way am I being asked to *repent*, that is to return to God and respond to the message of the Good News this Advent?

I pause and in silence listen to the Lord.

I finish praying the Gospel by saying '*Glory be to the Father...*'