

Notes for Next Sunday
Third Sunday in Advent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Zephaniah 3:14-20). Israel, with its religious leaders leading the way, had forsaken the Lord. They had been ultimately led into exile. Now Zephaniah is sharing the happy news that a remnant would return from Babylonia and be able to resume worshiping the Lord and having their feast stored.

Epistle (Philippians 4:4-7). Paul ends this epistle on a high note. In many ways it is like he started his address of the Philippians. Paul had good feelings about the Philippians and how they supported him and now he encourages them to continue to keep up their good work.

Gospel (Luke 7:18-28). John is imprisoned when our text begins. After boldly preaching repentance John is confused. Jesus' ministry style seems to be quite the opposite of what had done. Jesus is sharing the gospel and bringing comfort the crowds. This perplexes John and he sends two of his disciples to go check on Jesus' ministry. He even asks "Are you the one to come or should we expect someone else." Jesus does not take offense at this and in fact praises John as the greatest prophet and gives John's a clear and comforting message.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Zephaniah 3:14-20

¹⁴ Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. ¹⁶ On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. ¹⁷ The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." ¹⁸ "The sorrows for the appointed feasts I will remove from you; they are a burden and a reproach to you. ¹⁹ At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you; I will rescue the lame and gather those who have been scattered. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they were put to shame. ²⁰ At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes," says the LORD.

Earlier in this chapter all classes of Judah's leaders are strongly scolded for indulging in conduct completely opposed to their vocations and responsibilities. They had hurt and misled the very people they were to protect and lead closer to the Lord. This led to Israel being taken into captivity.

God would now take away the punishments they had suffered like being able to once more celebrate the Passover. When they were exiled to Babylon, they had to give up all their festivals. Their land had been given to foreigners when they had been exiled. Now it would be returned to them. (v. 15)

God removes their sins and is present in the midst of His people with His protecting power. He is with them. He is protecting them from harm. He is delivering them from evil. He is quieting and comforting them in their fears and anxieties. And He is empowering their limp hands to move in service to Him. (vv. 17-19)

Now God will bring back the faithful remnant (back from Babylon to Israel) and they will celebrate. “Daughter of Zion” is not only the faithful remnant but also citizens of God’s Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church. (v. 20)

EPISTLE
Philippians 4:4-7

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

4:4 Rejoice in the Lord. Troubled people ought not be alone, for this is why God created the fellowship of the Church. Also, “To be gloomy before God is not pleasing to Him, although He would permit us to be depressed before the world” (AE 54:16). (TLSB)

4:6 in everything, by prayer. Anxiety and prayer are two great opposing forces in Christian experience.

4:6 thanksgiving. He’s given us that we’re thankful for. As we remember and recite all these blessings, this too, will vaporize our anxiety. (LifeLight)

4:7 peace of God. When life makes no sense, God’s peace sustains and directs us. Peace, not readiness or zeal, acts like a guardian angel for our mental health. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Luke 7:18-28

¹⁸ John’s disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, ¹⁹ he sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” ²⁰ When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’” ²¹ At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. ²² So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^a are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. ²³ Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” ²⁴ After John’s messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ²⁵ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. ²⁶ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is the one about whom it is written: “‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ ²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” ²⁹ (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.) ³¹ “To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.’ ³³ For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ³⁴ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.”’ ³⁵ But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”

John the Baptist has been sitting in jail for pointing out Herod's sin. He had preached repentance and prepared the way for Jesus. Now his reward seemed to be a miserable life and death in a dungeon. He shows his humanness by wondering whether Jesus was really the man he (John) had prepared the people to follow.

John took his concern to Jesus. We, too, need to take our doubts directly to Jesus. Jesus does not disappoint. He points to the Scriptures He is fulfilling. We have the Word today and it will never fail to do its work.

Instead of putting John down for his doubt Jesus goes on to praise John's work in being a forerunner to Him. Jesus describes John as a solidly grounded servant of the Lord (v. 24). Jesus says that John is totally focused on the mission that was given him (preparing people for Jesus their Savior). Jesus calls John the greatest prophet (v. 28).

In verse 28 we also find an incredible message of comfort for ourselves. He tells us that we, who may be the least in the kingdom are greater than John. Let me explain how that can be.

While John was related to Jesus, John was only a friend of the bridegroom or best man at the very most. We Christians are members of the Holy Christian Church. As such that makes us Jesus' bride. Brides almost always have a much more important status and spend more intimate time with the bridegroom than do best men (I haven't seen mine since our wedding day).

In verses 29-30 our text tells how the people including the tax collectors believed in Jesus. BUT, the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected the message.

In verses 31-34 Jesus confronts the spiritual leaders about their unbelief. He goes on to say that no matter what He or John He did the religious leaders would criticize and refuse to believe.

In the phrase "wisdom is proved right by all her children" (v. 35), wisdom is a synonym for "the plan of God," and "the rightness of God's plan" is wisdom personified (Jesus).

In contrast to the rejection by foolish critics, spiritually wise persons could see that the ministries of both John and Jesus were godly, despite their differences.