

December 13, 2015

3rd Sunday of Advent

God is in our midst!

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18

Zephaniah encourages Zion to sing joyfully and Israel to be glad and exalt with all its heart. The people are not to fear or be discouraged because the Lord has removed judgment from them and their enemies are turned away. The Lord is in their midst and renews them in his love.

Isaiah is confident and unafraid and his strength and courage are in the Lord. Listeners are to give thanks to the Lord and proclaim how exalted his name is. The Holy One of Israel is great and in our midst.

Paul tells the brothers and sisters in Philippi to let their kindness be known to all and to rejoice always in the Lord. They are to let go of all anxieties and make known their requests to the Lord. By setting their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus they will experience the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

The word of God came to John the Baptist and he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He explains that while he baptizes with water the One coming will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He tells all of his listeners that they shall see the salvation of God and he continues to preach the good news to all who listen.

**The Father sent Wisdom from on high,
The Son who baptizes with
The Holy Spirit and with fire.**

Zephaniah, Isaiah, Paul, and John emphatically proclaim that God is in our midst. Our God is a personal God who helps those who humbly seek help. In a similar manner we are to reach out to those less fortunate than ourselves and share with them from our abundance. Giving to those in need is a great blessing and we need to look into our hearts to first see that we deserve to be givers as well as receivers.

repentance



John the Baptist was a man fully aware of his surroundings and the exceptional nature of his mission. He believed the spiritual ways of Yahweh had been polluted and the waters of baptism and repentance were the first cleansing steps. Many religious leaders of his time had a vain sense of superiority and wanted the people to look up to them while they looked down upon them; they sullied the stream of inner life by misleading the people with flashy externals. Their outlook appeared to be narrowly restricted in that its concern was with self-righteousness in the realm of externals and social prestige, i.e., John viewed them to be only interested in promoting themselves. These self-righteousness leaders came to question John and he had no patience with them and his cutting words let them know this. John's condemnation and disapproval did not stem from prejudicial thinking but from spiritual ways that he deemed important in relation to God's Kingdom. The common people sensed this and those who were outcasts according to strict religious norms were the ones who paid most attention to his message; John emphasized the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law.

(For interesting and more detailed comments on John the Baptist see pp. 9-12, *Thirty Studies About Jesus*, Edward I. Bosworth, 1927)

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