

Scripture Study

Third Sunday of Advent—Cycle C



Opening prayer

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

(Isaiah 12:2-6)

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's gospel is a continuation of last Sunday's where we met John the Baptist as he is baptizing and preparing people for the coming Messiah.
- Between that reading and this Sunday's, we see John warning the crowds that they must "bear good fruits" that show their repentance (Luke 3:7-9). They are not to rely on their status as God's Chosen People, the Jews.
- In our opening verse, we see various people asking John: If they cannot rely on these things "**What then should we do?**"
- **Note:** this is a common question in Luke's gospel (Luke 3:10, 12, 14; 10:25, 18:18). In Luke's other inspired work, the Acts of the Apostles, the answer to this question always includes *sacramental* baptism (Acts 2:37; 16:30; 22:10-16).

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, what are the reasons that the people are called upon to rejoice? Who is also rejoicing and why?
- In the 2nd Reading, Why does Paul—and Jesus, for that matter (read Matthew 6:25–34; Luke 10:41; 12:25–29)—forbid anxiety? What kinds of anxiety do you experience in everyday life? How might you do more to follow Paul's advice in verse 4?
- What do the wheat and chaff in verse 17 of the Gospel Reading signify (see Isaiah 29:5-6, 41:16, Jeremiah 15:7; Malachi 3:2-3)? What does John say will happen on the day of judgment to those who are like chaff, rather than wheat (Psalm 1:4-6; Matthew 13:24-30)?
- In light of John's rugged lifestyle and seemingly uncompromising nature (Matthew 3:1-10), how would you rate the severity of his requirements for those who are seeking to know the way of repentance (verses 10-14)?
- In terms of your personal experience, what does it mean to be baptized with the holy Spirit and fire (verse 16)? How has that Spirit and fire touched your life?
- Who have been the John the Baptists in your life—people who have shown you the way, led you to Christ, and encouraged you?
- If **you** asked John the Baptist, "**What then should we do?**" how would he answer?
- In keeping with the penitential tone of Advent, what one action will you take this week to produce fruit in your life?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 535, 696, 2447

Closing prayer

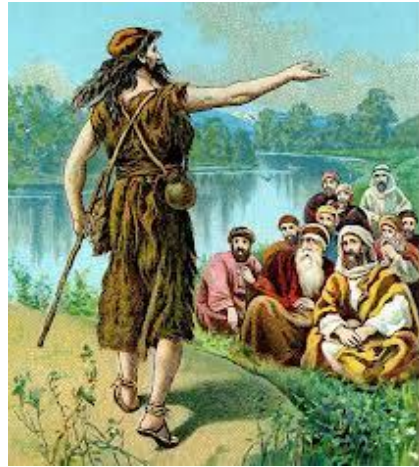
Think well. Speak well. Do well. These three things, through the mercy of God, will make a man go to Heaven. -St. Camillus de Lellis

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire"

Gospel Reading: *Luke 3:10-18*

Meditation: Why did thousands come out to hear John the Baptist? And what was so unusual about his message? Luke says that John "preached good news to the people" (Luke 3:17). John's message of repentance was very practical. He told the people three things: First, we must share our goods with one another, especially with those who lacked the necessities of life. Isn't that what it really means to love your neighbor as yourself? True love is sacrificial and generous. Second, we must give every person their due and take no advantage of another because of their position or status. For example, those who have the duty to collect taxes from others must charge no more than what is rightfully due. (Tax collectors often made handsome profits for themselves by overcharging others.) Those who have authority over others must not demand more than what is just and right. Soldiers in the Roman army could compel any citizen to assist them whenever they wished, such as carrying their heavy supplies for them or giving them food and drink. They often, however, abused their position to force people to do more for them than what was necessary. John did not tell them to leave their profession, but to be good, honest, and respectful soldiers. And thirdly, John exhorted his listeners to be content with what they had and to avoid coveting what belonged to others. John basically called the people to turn back to God and to walk in his way of love and righteousness. Whenever the



gospel is proclaimed it has power to awaken faith in people and to change their lives for good. Do you believe that God's word is "good news" for you? And do you allow its transforming power to free you from sinful habits and harmful addictions?

John's baptism was for repentance – turning away from sin and taking on a new way of life according to God's word. John said that the Messiah would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Fire in biblical times was associated with God and with his action in the world and in the lives of his people. God sometimes manifested his presence by use of fire, such as the burning bush which was not consumed when God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2). The image of fire was also used to symbolize God's glory (Ezekiel 1:4, 13), his protective presence (2 Kings 6:17), his holiness (Deuteronomy 4:24), his righteous judgment (Zechariah 13:9), and his wrath against sin (Isaiah 66:15-16). John expanded this image with the illustration of the process of separating wheat from chaff. A winnowing fan or shovel was used for tossing the wheat in the air. The heavier

kernels of wheat fell to the ground, while the lighter chaff was carried off by the wind. The chaff was then collected and used for fuel (see Isaiah 21:10).

In the New Testament, the image of fire is also used of the Holy Spirit who comes to cleanse us from sin and make us holy (Matthew 3:11 and Acts 2:3). God's fire both purifies us of sin and it inspires in us a reverent fear of God and of his word. And it increases our desire for holiness and for the joy of meeting the Lord when he comes again. Do you want to be on fire for God and for the return of the Lord Jesus when he comes in his glory? Our baptism in Jesus Christ by water and the Spirit results in a new birth and entry into God's kingdom as his beloved sons and daughters (John 3:5). Jesus is ready to give us the fire of his Spirit that we may radiate the joy of the gospel to a world in desperate need of God's light and truth. The word of God has power to change and transform our lives that we may be lights pointing others to Jesus Christ, the true light of the world (John 8:12). Like John the Baptist, we too are called to give testimony to the light and truth of Jesus Christ. Do you point others to Jesus Christ in the way you speak and live?

"Lord Jesus, let your light burn brightly in my heart that I may know the joy and freedom of your kingdom. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and empower me to witness the truth of your gospel and to point others to the light of Christ."

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