

Third Sunday of Advent – Cycle C  
Focus: Wholly Transforming

First Reading  
[ZEP 3:14-18A](#)

Psalm  
[IS 12:2-3, 4, 5-6](#)

Second Reading  
[PHIL 4:4-7](#)

Gospel  
[LK 3:10-1](#)

Gaudete in Domino semper! Rejoice in the Lord Always! For indeed the Lord is Near! Rejoice, joy, it can be elusive at times, can it not? In today's first reading from Zephaniah, times were bad for the people of Israel as well. There was political turmoil and the people of Israel had fallen into idolatry and unfaithfulness. Wait, we're talking about Zephaniah, right? This is an uncanny resemblance to our own circumstances. Our own political inactiveness and disconnectedness followed by the ever-increasing numbers of those declaring no religious affiliation or faith. This coupled with an idolatrous focus on commercialism, isolationism, and popularizing immoral behavior as being OK, we as a people, are very similar to those about whom Zephaniah was writing.

What about our second reading from Paul's letter to his most favorite community in Philippi? Paul was writing from prison and was trying to address the anxiety the Philippians were experiencing. There was anxiety concerning when Christ would return, would they be able to stay faithful, and how they were living their lives. Hold on a minute, like Zephaniah, Paul's community is very much like our own. There is much anxiety within our own communities and families, anxiety about our economy, about our political bodies, the climate and the world in general. Paul's Philippian community might as well be us here in this time. Given our own problems and anxieties, would you not agree that at times it is difficult to find joy, be at peace, and seek the unity of the faithful? However, when you consider the rest of the readings and the very nature of this particular Sunday in Advent, we are called to do just that. To Rejoice!

Our first two readings go on to express God's never ending love and that God's grace and love are transformative into songs of joy and peace. Ok, we kind of understand that, right? but still, how does one increase our own joy and peace? Is going out after work, going on vacation, or attending to a party going to increase our joy and peace. Will drugs and other addictions increase our joy and peace? The answer, of course is no. Why?

To answer this question, let's first define joy. As Matthew Fox has described, "Joy is the suspension of time, of place, of ego... to literally standing outside

of oneself. It is touch, being touched, and being in touch... it is about everything possible and impossible... Joy, as he goes on, is a gift of the Spirit. You can only taste and do it. You only announce it." So while all the activities to try to increase our joy like parties, shopping, and so forth only end up only increasing our happiness for a short time. They do nothing to increase our inner joy and peace.

Therefore, the best example of Matthew Fox's expression of joy is when you stop and lose your breath at the very beauty of God's creation, sacrifice, or gift. This breathlessness wells up to erupt as a smile and the tears of joy flow for some of us. Some obvious times this could happen would be during an appreciation of a particular sunrise or sunset; seeing your bride on your wedding day as she comes through the doors of the church radiating the beauty, love, kindness, and all the little things for which you fell in love; or the birth of your child, niece, or nephew and the many other times in those children's lives as we marvel at those most precious gifts no matter how long we have them. In these examples, peace and joy was not obtained or achieved but gifted by the objects of that grace. Thus peace and joy can only be increased through the giving of peace and joy. To be clear, in these examples, who was the author, the artist who gave the gift of peace and joy? God!

As St. Paul said, the Lord is near. The Lord, the real presence in Word and Sacrament is near. We are the body of Christ and thus we are called to be more than instruments of peace and joy but creators and givers of peace and joy.

What John the Baptist taught us is that in professing the Gospel we are transformed into makers of peace and joy. Now this transformation is more than just changing our way of thinking or a particular habit. No it is much more. This transformation, to be peace and joy giving, is of our very hearts and the transformation is substantial similar to how the fire changes dough to bread.

The Gospel of Christ compels us and instructs us on how we can become the creators of peace and joy. The first, as conveyed by John today, is that of living justly. The second, is to act with mercy as prescribed in Matthew 25:31. The third, as St. Augustine said, is to simply become what you eat and be Christ to all. By becoming creators of peace and joy, we are also filled with many more breathless moments given to us by God. Imagine a

world, a country, a community, a parish family filled with these breathless moments. This is the gift of Christ who is so near. So be transformed and Rejoice!