

The Vine at Home
Third Sunday of Advent Time – Year C
Sunday 12th December 2021

Call to worship

Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bring myself and let go of myself,
In order to meet with the divine.

Here I am to say that you are my God. Here I am. Send me. Amen.¹

Opening Prayers

Take a moment to be peaceful.

If you are able you may like to plant your feet on the floor and concentrate on your body being still (*if this is hard then do just sit quietly and comfortably*). Notice how you feel and what you are thinking about and let those things float away giving thanks for each even if they are difficult feelings or thoughts

When you are ready

Raise your hands open before you and give thanks for the moment you are in.

Pause

Place your open hands on your lap and consider all that's happened this week and what you might want to lay down before God asking for help or offering thanks

Pause

Lift one hand high in the air and think about what you will offer of yourself as you worship today.

Pause

Lower your hands and pick up your service sheet.

If you feel able offer the following prayer:

Loving God, I am here in this moment to worship you. Amen.²

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version most familiar or comfortable to you.

Reading: Luke 3:7-18

7 John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. **9** Even now the ax is

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Jane Bingham

lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

10 And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” **11** In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” **12** Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” **13** He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” **14** Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,^[a] **16** John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with^[b] the Holy Spirit and fire. **17** His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Reflections on the reading

There are many things we have to wait for in daily life, the full range of the good, the bad and the monotonous! I'm sure a lot of us can sadly sympathise with waiting around for a replacement bus or train? Or waiting around for test or exam results? Or that delivery company that said they would drop a parcel at your house 'somewhere between 7 and 3'? Or how about waiting around for next episode of Doctor Who?

Advent is the season of waiting and preparing. Perhaps some of us are thinking ahead to Christmas and all that there is still to plan. The tension, the apprehension and perhaps even the feelings of dread of what's to come. But before you start thinking about whether or not the turkey is big enough for everyone, take a moment to pause and rest in the moment of now.

Take a moment to think about the year that is about to come to a close.

Take a moment to pause, in the spirit of Advent, before plunging into the Christmas season.

Traditionally, this third Sunday in Advent is known as 'Gaudete Sunday'. Rather than being named after the popular Steeleye Span track, it takes its name from the Latin word 'Gaudete' meaning rejoice – meaning this is the 'Sunday of Joy'. Traditionally, this Sunday opens with those few verses from Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always.

Now, that's a lovely sentiment, but really hard to practice, wouldn't you agree?

The thing is; when we are at our lowest and can't rejoice, we have a community, a family even, around us to rejoice when we cannot. To be joyful when we cannot. To

'Rejoice in the Lord' when we just cannot. Some of you might know this as the Ubuntu philosophy or 'the belief in humanity towards others.'

That doesn't mean we have to be glib and fake our smiles or pretend to be happy, but it means that there is a base-note about the Christian story that is filled with hope, with opportunity, with potential, with a dawn that comes at the end of a long night, with a resurrection at the most unexpected of times. Can you hear the Advent base-note today?

As we are gathered here, now, on Gaudete Sunday, rejoicing and praising the Lord, let's take this time to rejoice in the little victories from this past year of 2021, for all the good that has happened to us this year. Gaudete invites us to count our blessings, and rejoice in our Lord, always.

Where do you get your joy?

Take a moment to think about that question, and what it might mean for you and yours. Where is your joy coming from? Are you spending enough time nurturing those sources of rejoicing?

And, as part of a way of nurturing joy, perhaps you'd like to find someone else in your life to ask – at some point this week – 'where do you find your joy?' It's a great conversation starter, and opens up the possibility for conversation and discussion around faith and evangelism. Why not choose someone, right now, who you will ask this of in the week ahead.

Let us pray.

God of all joy, bless our conversations and our desire for connection. Fill us with your joy, and help us to be people who spread joy in your world – give us an opening this week to being a conversation about joy with someone in our lives. Bless us by your Spirit, Amen.³

Hymn: 176 STF – Like a candle flame, flickering small in our darkness -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZGVQKjn_V8

Blessing

Christmas is coming.

Holiness is in the air.

The Spirit of God is just waiting to make herself known to my, this day and in this season.

Let me go out into the world and carry the light of the Christ child with me. Amen.⁴

³ Reflection written by Tim Annan-Hood

⁴ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

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