

Third Sunday of Advent
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Once upon a year ago, the third Sunday of Advent was considered a kind of hiatus, a joyful break, in what was a time of penance, Advent now is a joyful time of reflection and celebration rather than a time of austerity and that call to celebration and rejoicing is seen in the readings for this Sunday.

From the Hebrew scriptures comes the call to rejoice, in the reading from Isaiah we are told that "...The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing..." that "...the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes..."

Further, Psalm 146 tells us that: "... [God] gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; The Lord loves the righteous; the Lord cares for the stranger; He sustains the orphan and widow."

One of the optional readings for this Sunday is that of Mary's Magnificat; here in Mary's song (a midrash of Deborah's in the Jewish scriptures) we are also called to rejoicing because: "...He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation. He has shown the strength of His arm, He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He

has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty...”

And so it is odd that with these calls to rejoicing, these reminders of God’s willingness to bless, the Gospel reading is full of questions, full of uncertainty. It is the passage in Matthew where John sends his disciples to those of Jesus to ask; “...Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

Does it seem odd to you as it does to me that this passage is tied in with those others? What were the lectionary authors? Were they simply trying to get as much of Jesus’ background story into the December readings as possible or is there an important point being made? John lived in that time when those scriptures speaking of celebration, redolent of rejoicing were coming to pass. He was, as it were, where the rubber meets the road, This scripture passage, I think, reminds us that we often see what we expect to see. John, it seems to me, saw Jesus’ works of healing and redemption coloured by the expectation that Israel would become a Kingdom again. how often do we fail to see God’s blessings because they don’t come in the form or in the way we want or were expecting? Perhaps then we need to let go of expectations, of wanting, and simply rejoice as we move toward this our celebration of Jesus’ birth.