

## REJOICE, REJOICE!

A reflection on the Readings for Advent 3B

Is 61: 1-2a, 10-11; 1Thess 5:16-24, 11-13; John 1:19-28

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When I was a boy, the past two Sundays' gloom instilled *the fear of God* in our parents and terrorized us. But we knew things would change on *Pink Sunday*. We could then focus on the gifts and goodies our moms stealthily hid in not-so-secret closets, hoping we'd be distracted by the seasonal music thrumming throughout our homes.

**Do you see what I see,** said the night wind to the little lamb? I see the prophet Isaiah "clothed in a robe of salvation, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem." The Spirit of the Lord is upon him. He "rejoices heartily in the Lord", for he brings "glad tidings for the poor".

**Do you hear what I hear,** said the lamb to the shepherd boy? I hear a teenage girl proclaiming the greatness of her God. As in Isaiah, the Spirit is upon her. I hear her accepting Gabriel's invitation to become mother to the Messiah. *My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked upon his lowly servant.*

Today's first Reading and the Magnificat connect the dots between promises. The God of Isaiah promises to *heal the brokenhearted, to free captives and prisoners*. The God of Mary promises a messiah *who will save his people from their sins*. He's the same God who sends someone who lives in the wilderness, feeds on locusts and honey and wears rough camel's hair clothing. The God of Jesus sends a humble but fearless prophet, a *man named John*.

He's not Elijah, nor the Prophet, nor the Messiah. *Who are you then?*, ask those sent to check him out. He claims to be *the voice in the desert*. He's only a warm-up act, he warns, while proclaiming, *Make straight the way of the Lord*. In other words, get ready for the great reveal, the unfolding of God's liberating love for abused and defenseless seniors, women and children, the poor of God.

What's so new about this messiah? What's really different is that the first on his "nice" list are the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners. *The one who is already among us* comes especially for the lowly and the least. Yahweh has chosen the weakest, the abandoned and the oppressed to be saved first!

Will our names be on the Saviour's "nice list"? Do we even realize our need to be saved? Who are we waiting for? Who are we longing for? Would we join the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan? Would his baptism find us a home to go to, break our various addictions, calm our shop-til-you drop mindsets, maybe fix our maxed out credit cards? Would we trust John's water baptism to forgive our sometimes deep separation from God himself? Mary, the lowly one, is the only human being whose soul was never separated from her God and always totally open to his Spirit. She had no idea what becoming mother of the Messiah entailed, but she absolutely loved and trusted her God. She said yes, and rejoiced.

Which brings us back to the Baptist. He recognized the Emmanuel and announced his imminent arrival. Who IS he, ask the Pharisees? His answer is the typical answer of a lowly servant: *I am unworthy to untie his sandal strap*. Perhaps we need to be less like Kris... Kringle that is, who mysteriously vanishes after Boxing Day, and more like the Baptist. He knew who he was not, who he was, and what he was here for. Do we? Could we answer these three questions with a quote from today's Readings:

1. I am not \_\_\_\_\_?
2. I am \_\_\_\_\_?
3. I can testify to the Light by \_\_\_\_\_?

*In your palace warm, mighty king, do you know what I know?* I know that, if we are to *rejoice always*, as St. Paul urges in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, we also need to *pray always*, to *pray for peace everywhere, /.../ for the child who is sleeping will bring Peace and Light* to those who have suffered so long in captivity and darkness.

By all means, let's deck the halls, don our gay apparel and break out the Hallelujah Chorus. But what if the brokenhearted, the captives and the prisoners, could be delivered only if the Christmas Light shone through

each one of us, even only one of us? To the extent that, through us, we trust God's Spirit to kindle hope and joy in the least among us, only then can we own the angels' tidings of comfort and joy.

Then, *the young and the old, the frightened and the bold, the greatest and the least*, we can all come to the Lord's feast singing with thankful hearts,

*Rejoice, rejoice o Israel  
To you shall come Emmanuel.*