



Advent 3

THE NEW SHOFAR

...there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. ⁸ Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, ⁹ yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant - **Job 14:7-9**

Joy in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty

In the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, with the country on the brink of disaster, Zephaniah invited Judah to sing and shout aloud, to rejoice, even! Their fortunes were to be restored. God was with them, in their midst. That, of course, is exactly what we have with the coming of Jesus. Zephaniah the prophet uses a Hebrew phrase “in your midst” more than anywhere else in the entire Old Testament. The phrase is often translated this way: *The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you. Never again will you fear any harm.*

As Christians, we affirm that the man, Jesus, was also God in the flesh. We use the term “Immanuel” from Isaiah 7 to refer to Jesus. It literally means, “God with us.” The crux of the hope in this passage from Zephaniah 3 is that God is with us. This is the hope of the season of Advent. Even though uncertainty abounds, even though nothing looks as it should, in Jesus, God is quite literally “in our midst.” With God in our midst, we need not fear any longer. As God continues to be present during the worst of times, we learn more of God’s character.

Verse 15 says that the Lord, in their midst, is their king. For Christians, we proclaim this truth about Jesus. He is our king and Lord. And he is the king of love who dwells in our midst. And this is cause for celebration. It gives us hope in the midst of suffering, peace in the midst of uncertainty, and joy in the midst of sorrow so that we can love others with the same love of the Messiah.

Out of Darkness, Joy:

The candles of Advent are mainly purple. While this is a colour for royalty, it is also a colour for penitence. This penitence is disrupted today by the rose-coloured candle. Its purpose is to introduce the theme of joy into our lives of penitential preparations. We are to live this week with a focus on spreading Gospel Joy to others. It’s fitting that our passage in Zephaniah 3 would be the passage for the week of joy. In it the prophet interrupts an oracle of doom and destruction with promises of celebration and joy.

This joy is born out of a threefold hope. These verses first speak of a hope to the people of Judah – even though they’ve been unfaithful, God will restore them because God is in their midst. Second, Christians derive hope in this passage as we see its fulfillment

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in Jesus. Through Jesus, God is in our midst. Third we see even today that Christ is in our midst still, through the Holy Spirit, and Christ will return one day to restore all creation. For these reasons, God's people throughout the centuries have ongoing reason to celebrate with joy. We live in a world extending beyond the immediate.

What does joy look like when life still has struggles? That's the power of this passage. These words of restoration were not uttered in a vacuum. They come after two and a half chapters of judgment and pronouncement of doom. How much more powerful are these words, then, when considering all that's come before? We, too, even when we see challenges around us, can celebrate God's ongoing and future restorative work.

This Joy is more than a feeling. It requires a choice. We make an active decision to choose joy. We choose to remember God's promise and recognize that God is in our midst. While we await Christ's return, in faith, we choose joy now. We remember God's faithfulness. We worship our Lord and King, who is strong, mighty, and for us. In this Advent season, how does God's presence in our midst give you hope? What promises of God's faithfulness do we need to cling to?

According to John, Jesus is the Light of the world. Just as the dawn of each new day brings joy, the coming of Jesus, the Light of the world, causes us to rejoice. We, the Church, are called to bear witness to Christ by word and deed, in good times and bad—when it suits us and when it doesn't. The witness of the Church, ironically, has often been more faithful under persecution than under prosperity. We need to be messengers who point out Christ to others, just as John did. John the Baptist's role as a joyful witness prepared the way for Jesus. John also provides an example for us because our vocation as Christians is to bear "witness" to Christ by our transparent Christian lives.

By Baptism we become members of the family of Christ, the true Light of the world. Jesus said: "*You are the light of the world.*" Hence, our mission as brothers and sisters of Christ and members of his Church is to reflect Christ's Light to others, just as the moon reflects the light of the sun. It is especially important during the Advent season that we reflect Christ's unconditional love and forgiveness. There are too many people who live in darkness and poverty, and who lack real freedom. There are others who are deafened and blinded by the cheap attractions of the world. Also, many feel lonely, unwanted, rejected, and marginalized. All these people are waiting for us to reflect the Light of Christ and to turn their lives into experiences of joy, wholeness and integrity. The joy of Jesus, the joy of Christmas can only be ours to the extent that we work with Jesus to bring joy into the lives of others. Let us remember that Christmas is not complete unless we show real generosity to those who have nothing to give us in return.