



Advent 3

THE NEW SHOFAR

To be Orthodox means to have the God-man Christ constantly in our soul, to live in Him, think in Him, feel in Him, act in Him. In other words, to be Orthodox means to be a Christ-bearer and a Spirit-bearer - *St Justin*

Who are the broken-hearted for whom Jesus had such a significant ministry?

Why do we have broken-hearted Christians in our pews? Why do we see Christians who would choose to abandon the church of their youth? For a faith community that is supposed to be built up on the Good News of Jesus the Messiah of God, we do seem to have significant moments of disquiet, misunderstandings, and disappointment. Our season of Advent is a great time to ask “Why is it “?

The prophecy of Isaiah - hope is found in Christ Jesus

The prophets were ecstatic in their proclamation of the message of God’s restoration of the whole of creation, a creation that was groaning...*we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Romans 8:22)*. To better understand this text, it helps to consider the context. In Romans 8, the apostle Paul is teaching believers that their new life in Jesus Christ is solidly founded on God’s promises and plans for His children. The first promise Paul touches on is that of future glory: *I consider our present sufferings insignificant compared to the glory that will soon be revealed to us (Romans 8:18)*. Our lives here are but an anticipation of what is to come.

We may suffer in the present through our journey here on earth, but Paul and other NT writers remind us that this world is not home (**1 Peter 2:11; Hebrews 11:13**). Awaiting us is a future kingdom where death is defeated, tears of sorrow, pain, and grief wiped away (**Revelation 21:4**). When we firmly lay hold of this promise from God, we can begin to view our current troubles as light and momentary when compared to the far greater eternal weight of glory (**2 Corinthians 4:17**).

That time is now

Rejoice always is Paul’s message in **1 Thessalonians 5**. He urges believers to *pray without ceasing*. It does not matter what is going on all around us, we should *in all circumstances give thanks*. Why is that? Because *this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus*. God sent His Only Son to become one of us so that in Him we might have access to this new Creation inaugurated in His birth, his life, His death, His resurrection, and His rising in glory to reign forever.

This is why he warns Christians in Thessalonica *not to quench the Spirit*. God’s Spirit is at work everywhere and in all peoples – even if they seek to resist and deny Him. Paul goes on to stress how this is the way God works. It may not be the way we would prefer the Almighty to carry out the divine work of salvation, but it is the only way of

Heaven. We should not *despise prophetic utterances* and we need to be wary about trying to limit the works of God, forcing the Almighty God to work only in those ways that are in tune with our own thinking. There is only one way to find the Peace and Joy

of *the* Kingdom and that way is to humble ourselves and submit to the will of the Creating and Redeeming God at work in His Church, the Body of Christ on earth.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

Isaiah today writes of the people of Israel returning from fifty years of exile in Babylon. His concern is that they return to lives of covenant faithfulness. This is an invitation for them to participate in the reconstruction works of Yahweh. This renewed Israel is to be a people in pursuit of justice, compassion, mercy, love and faithfulness. This is what God expects. The hard yards, however, are now ours to carry out under the Spirit with whom we are anointed. Just as an architect does not do the actual building of a new construction, that is left to the builders, so too is God calling us to be collaborators in the establishment of this New Creation.

Who are these collaborators partnering with God's designing Word in the reconstruction of Israel? Isaiah proclaims that it will be the poor, the broken-hearted, the former captive and incarcerated, and mourners who will *repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations*). Why is this so? Perhaps those on the receiving end of injustice and greed can envision an alternative way of living as a community. These collaborators join with God's designing Word. They do not turn back to a repetition of the sins which led to destruction in the first place. God knows that a society built in a collaboration between Himself and the poor will be more just and righteous than one constructed by the movers and shakers of this world. They serve God rather than the deceptive gods of greed, money and power.

God's option for the poor is proclaimed by Jesus

This concern for the marginalized emerges in Jesus's opening sermon in Nazareth where he says that as the Spirit-anointed Messiah, He has come *to proclaim* good news to the poor, *to free* captives, *to restore* the sight of the blind, and *to set the oppressed free* (Luke 4:18–19). **The lifting up** of the weak is also forecasted in Mary's Magnificat where she proclaims that the Lord *scatters* the proud, removing them from power while *exalting and lifting up* the lowly (Luke 1:51–52). Simeon similarly prophesies that Mary's Son will lead *to the falling* of some and *the rising* of others (Luke 2:34), which plays out in *the humiliation* of the elite and *the exaltation* of the lowly.

Luke tells us about Jesus's concern for those who were excluded by Jewish society, for the poor and disenfranchised. Jesus tells us that the poor are blessed (Luke 6:20), and end time blessings belongs to Lazarus rather than the rich man who lived a life fit for kings (Luke 16:19–31). Similarly, the birth of Jesus was revealed by angels to shepherds who weren't from the elite in Israelite society (Luke 2:8–20). Believers throughout history have often reflected on how unexpected it was that humble shepherds were told about the birth of the king of the world. Jesus had mercy on the lowest of the low in Jewish society, casting out demons from the demonized (Luke 4:31–37, 41; Luke 8:26–39; Luke 9:37–42) and healing lepers (Luke 5:12–16; cf. Luke 7:21–22) and the blind (Luke 4:18; Luke 7:21; Luke 18:35–43; cf. Luke 14:13, 21). The demonized were also avoided by the self-righteous since they were anti-social, troubled, and disturbing. They were not like the rest of us! Weird, crazy, the world's dills and so not worthy of acceptance by men or God. Those on the margins presumed they were forsaken by God, and that there was no hope for them. The Gospel truth is that it is the humble, the broken, and those excluded by the community who are the true disciples - if they repent of their sins and give themselves to Jesus.

Only the world seeks to marginalise people

Along the same lines, lepers were unclean and excluded from the community of God's people. Touching a leper was forbidden because then one would contract uncleanness, but when Jesus healed a leper, he showed compassion and touched him, acknowledging the leper's humanity and significance. The blind were also shoved to the margins of society since they couldn't participate in ordinary life in Jesus's time. But even if they could not see Jesus, he saw them and often stretched out his hand to restore their sight.

Jesus came *to seek and to save the lost* (Luke 19:10), and he teaches that hated Samaritans also belong to God. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the despised Samaritan is the only one who cares for the person robbed and beaten (Luke 10:25–37). When Jesus healed ten who were blind, only the Samaritan returned to give thanks to God (Luke 17:11–19), showing that his faith saved him. Luke's Gospel anticipates the book of Acts where the good news about Jesus goes to the ends of the earth and is proclaimed to all people everywhere.

There was no one Jesus did not love unconditionally

We see Jesus's love for outsiders when he summons tax-collectors and sinners to repentance. Jesus called Levi (Matthew; Matt. 9:9) to be his disciple, attending a feast where other tax collectors and sinners congregated. Tax collectors were particularly despised since they collaborated with the Romans and also skimmed money off the top for themselves. It was difficult for the Pharisees to imagine Jesus actually eating and having fellowship with those who were notorious for their sin (Luke 5:27–32; cf. Luke 7:29, 34). Table fellowship signalled acceptance and welcome, and the religious leaders thought they should be shunned. Once again, Jesus defies expectations, throwing the doors of the kingdom open for all who will repent.

The forgiving and loving message of God is recorded in the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the two lost sons (Luke 15:3–32). In the same way, the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector reveals that the tax collector was right with God instead of the Pharisee (Luke 18:9–14). Those who think they are righteous and productive, those who think they are pleasing to God, may be deceived. It is the humble, the broken and the excluded who are more likely to be Jesus's disciples. God did not love their poverty and suffering, but in their poverty they knew what it was to need God and to be filled with the kind of love God alone can give them.

Jesus was sent by God as our Light in the darkness

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John (1:6). He was there because God has chosen him and commissioned him in his role as a witness to Jesus the Light that has come into a darkened world: He (John) came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world (1:7-9).

On this Third Sunday of Advent, we are offered a unique insight into the vocation given to that all men and women of faith. Like John, we too are called to by God. Each one of us who has heard the words of the gospel and understand how the gift of faith is not a

gift for our own consolation and salvation. Like John, God commissions us to bear witness to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the one who has come in the flesh, the one who is here with us, and the one who will come again in his reign as Lord of all. Our every word and deed must become a powerful witness to this love God has for all men and women. It is only in our own transformation that we are then able to bring that divine Light to others.

Light is who God is, what God does

In the opening lines of Genesis chapter 1 we hear the first revealed words of God...*Let there be light and there was light.* In that single verse we have the fullness of the biblical message: God is and God is light. What more do we need to know? Everything else in the Bible illustrates the way **God-as-light** works. We see this in the Exodus, where God illuminates the way to the Promised Land as a pillar of fire. He who turns darkness into light engages directly in the lives of his people bringing them into the land of milk and honey. That is what God does, then, now and always

This is what John is saying to us in his Gospel. Jesus is that divine light, the same creative light of the Father, the same light that was at work from the beginning. That light now lives among us, leading us out of the darkness of sin into a life of freedom. No longer do we need to fear darkness of any kind, because Jesus our Light is victorious (overcoming the darkness of the grave) and in him we have a share in that same victory. The gates of hell can stand against the creative power of that Light.

Jesus – the Sun of righteousness

The last book of the Old Testament is the prophesy of Malachi and in **4:2** he writes *the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.* The impact of the that gift of healing will be such that on “that day” *the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all. The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra. Yes, a little child will even put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm.* Only God can make that happen. Only God lights up our world so that darkness of any kind has now power over us.

Notice: Jesus did not say, “I’ll point you to the light” or “I’ll give you the light.” He said, “**I am** the light.” The only Light. John’s Gospel tells us Jesus is the light that “shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). And Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy: “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (Matthew 4:16). Yet Jesus also told His followers, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). If we’re lights, what’s our power source? “The Lord is my light” (Psalm 27:1). “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). “The LORD will be your everlasting light” (Isaiah 60:20).