

■ The 64th Sharing of the Word

● First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-17

The 3rd Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete Sunday (Sunday of Joy), as it celebrates the joy of the Lord drawing near. This theme of joy resonates throughout the other readings as well. The song of joy for Zion (Jerusalem), the people of God, is rooted in the assurance of God's salvation and restoration, and the conviction that God will bring new blessings. God's judgment for Israel's sins concludes with their repentance during the Babylonian exile. The relationship with God is then restored through His love, mercy, and forgiveness of sins. This passage encourages believers to cast aside despair and powerlessness, holding on to faith without fear, and to avoid "letting their hands fall limp." As a "mighty Savior," God protects and rescues His people. The "quietness" and "songs of joy" born of love reflect God's overflowing delight in His people, offering comfort and security. This intimacy between God and His people is beautifully portrayed.

**【Zion, Jerusalem, and Israel】**

Zion refers to the City of David, a part of Jerusalem located on the southeastern hill, and is often used to represent the holy place where God's temple stands or the specific gathering place of God's people (see Psalms 48:2-3; Isaiah 2:2-3). Jerusalem refers to the entire city, including Zion. Israel is often personified as a woman, with Zion and Jerusalem described as daughters, symbolizing the closeness and affection between God and His people.

● Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Writing from prison, Paul encourages the believers in the Philippian church to rejoice even amidst hardship. This joy not only reduces stress and clarifies thinking but also leads to constructive ideas, offering both psychological and spiritual peace. The imminent return of the Lord, or the celebration of His birth, assures believers of His constant presence (Immanuel). Therefore, they are urged to treat others with patience and gentleness. Paul advises entrusting worries to the Lord, offering thanks for His blessings first, and then presenting specific requests in prayer. By doing so, believers receive peace that surpasses human understanding, freeing them from fear and filling their hearts with tranquility.

● Gospel Reading: Luke 3:10-18

Hearing John's message, the crowds repent and ask what they should do in practical terms. Repentance is expressed through acts of love for neighbors: those with excess share with those in need; tax collectors act honestly and refrain from exploitation; soldiers avoid abusing their power, harming others, and are content with their wages. The key takeaway here is to "remember the kindness you have received but forget the kindness you have given."

The crowd eagerly anticipates the arrival of the Messiah, and some even wonder if John himself is the Savior. John humbly denies this, proclaiming the coming of a mightier One (Jesus), who will baptize with "the Holy Spirit and fire." He speaks of Jesus' spiritual work and purifying power. Using the image of a winnowing fork, John describes how Jesus will separate the grain (the righteous) from the chaff (the wicked), illustrating that Jesus' salvation is accompanied by judgment. John teaches that repentance must be demonstrated through concrete actions (Luke 3:8) and that salvation through Jesus comes with accountability.

**【Baptism with the Holy Spirit and Fire】**

1. Baptism with the Holy Spirit

- 1) God pours out His Spirit, granting believers new life and a close relationship with Him (John 3:5-8; Acts 2:1-4).
- 2) Jesus promises to send the "Helper" (the Holy Spirit) to guide, teach, and empower believers (John 14:26).
- 3) The Holy Spirit works within believers, equipping them to fulfill their God-given mission and become

witnesses to the world (Acts 1:8).

## 2. Baptism with Fire

- 1) In the Bible, fire symbolizes purification and judgment, burning away sin and sanctifying people (Malachi 3:2-3).
- 2) Fire also represents God's judgment: those who repent are saved, while those who do not are condemned (Matthew 13:40-42; Luke 3:17).

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