

BIBLE STUDY
December 6, 2021

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Zephaniah 3: 14-18a

Luke 3: 10-18

Philippians 4: 4-7

1. Zephaniah 3: 14-18a

- Zephaniah is one of the twelve Minor Prophets. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah, just before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. He warned of a day of the Lord that would be of darkness and destruction, anguish and distress because of the nation's worship of the gods of their neighbors and the misguided rule of their leaders. Zephaniah was a contemporary to the early ministry of Jeremiah. Our selection for Sunday is the last chapter that offers a word of hope for the restoration and consolation of Jerusalem and its inhabitants.
- **V. 14:** Jerusalem is to rejoice and shout in joy about what God is about to do.
- **V. 15:** The Lord has forgiven the people and rescued them from their enemies. They have nothing to fear because God is in their midst.
- **V. 16:** On the day of the Lord, Jerusalem will be told not to not fear or be discouraged.
- **V. 17:** God is in their midst. He dwells among them. He is a savior. He rejoices over them and renews his love for them. God will sing because of them.
- **V. 18:** He will sing as if he were at a festival.

2. Luke 3: 10-18

- **Vv. 10-14:** John gives practical advice to the crowd about how they should repent and seek forgiveness. He addresses three groups: the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers. To the crowd he tells them to share what they have with others. To the tax collectors, who always demanded more money above the tax for themselves, he tells to stop making a profit off their fellow countrymen. To the soldiers, who were always demanding bribes, he told them to accept their pay and not extort more. In John's preaching we see themes which will become important in Luke's Gospel. A love of money that inspires greed and an attachment to material things are dangerous threats that erode our relationship with God.
- **V. 15:** When John appeared on the scene, the expectation of the Messiah's coming was high. They asked if John were the Messiah.
- **V. 16** He clearly stated that he was not. A "stronger one" was coming who was so much greater than John that he was unworthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. John's baptism was with water—a symbolic washing away of sins. Jesus' baptism would be with the Holy Spirit and fire. Jesus' baptism was a participation in his death and resurrection. In Baptism, we die with Christ so that we can rise with Christ.

- **V. 17:** John seemed to think that the Messiah would be like him, a preacher of fire and brimstone. He expected the Messiah to pass judgement on the sinfulness of the people and purify them with fire—as gold is purified. Jesus was a preacher of mercy and healing. (Later, John will seem confused whether Jesus is really the Messiah or not because he was so different from what John expected. From prison, John sends messengers to Jesus asking him if he were the one or should they look for another.)
- **V. 18:** This is just one example of many ways in which John preached to the people. He preached “good news,” the Gospel.

3. **Philippians 4: 4-7**

- **V. 4:** Paul tells the community to rejoice and emphasizes it by repeating it.
- **V. 5:** A sign of rejoicing is kindness, which is consideration, tolerance, fairness. The reason for joy and kindness is the nearness of the Lord. For the Philippians, it was the nearness of his second coming that they expected in their lifetime. For us, it is the second coming but also his nearness to us every day as he promised to be with us always as Emmanuel, God with us. In our worship life, it is his nearness as the feast of Christmas draws near.
- **V. 6:** This verse recalls a well know saying, “Worry about nothing, pray about everything.” Prayer is our ongoing conversation with God to tell him our needs. We depend upon God for everything so we need to tell him what we need. By entrusting our needs to him, we free ourselves from worry. Our petitions are always accompanied by thanksgiving for what God has already done for us.
- **V. 7:** In answer to our prayers, God will give us his peace. God’s peace passes all understanding. Even though we have many reasons to be anxious, the peace of God lifts our anxiety and fear. We let go of fear and trust God. We hand over our fears to God who sends us peace. This peace guards—watches over—our hearts and minds through the power and love of Jesus the Christ.