

Rejoice!

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Advent / Joy; Faithful; Unfaithful / Isaiah 61:1–4; Isaiah 61:8–11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24; John 1:6–8; John 1:19–28

Rejoice! God is Faithful

- › **Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Coming Advent King. Amen.**

Today is the Third Sunday in Advent. On this day we light the pink candle on the Advent Wreath which is the candle of joy. On this day, we are encouraged to rejoice in the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text begins: “Rejoice Always!” Yes, that is the Lord’s Call to us to Rejoice All the time. A few short words later: Give Thanks in all Circumstances!

Yet, when we look around ourselves and in ourselves we see very few circumstances that cause us to rejoice. Yes, you and I look forward to celebrating the coming of the Son of God at Christmas. But when we look inside ourselves, this joy can be dampened...quenched, snuffed out. We have not been the consistently faithful servants God calls us to be. We have faltered in our prayers. We have neglected to give thanks as we ought. Our sin can cause us to fail to know the joy of God’s salvation. Nevertheless, in the Epistle for today (that I just read), Paul would bid you once again to

Rejoice! For God is Faithful to make and keep you holy in Christ!

Let me ask you all this today. How many of you have rejoiced that Covid is here? How many of you have said thank you for your circumstances you find yourselves in? How many of you have suffered some pain, grief, or loss and rejoiced? How many of you have thanked God for a malady...whether it’s physical, emotional, or even intellectual?

As you think of those questions, let’s look inside of ourselves. Daily, dear family of God, we are unfaithful in living out the Christian lives that God wills for us.

Even in good times, even in times of great celebration we are sporadic at best in rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks.

We don't rejoice, pray, or give thanks continually as God wills. God says we are to do this ALWAYS, without ceasing, in ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. Sometimes we do admit we rejoice when the unexpected happens...the unexpected good things. Mostly we pray when things are going very wrong. And we often forget to give thanks to God for all his benefits, especially day to day.

We often despise God's Word that tells us what are to do and what not to do. How do we do this? We neglect His Word. We don't listen to his Word preached...whether that's in the building or even take the time and watch online. We plug our ears to God's commands and prohibitions...especially when they make us very uncomfortable. You know those commands that we don't like to follow. We choose to have a deaf ear to those. We want to do what we want to do after all.

We don't hold fast the good or test everything, but instead embrace evil. St. Paul writes the following to the church in Philippi:

English Standard Version Chapter 4

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

We readily listen uncritically to voices that sound appealing—theology that sacrifices Scripture for the spirit of our times, the latest self-help fad that makes me, rather than my Lord, the true helper. We buy into all kinds of evil that our world advertises—pornography, premarital sex, extra-marital sex, unscriptural divorce. It's not just these issues - we listen to evolutionary thought. We listen to the idea that one can change their God-given sex. We listen to the idea that a man can marry another man or woman another woman. We listen to the ideas that not everyone is created equal. We buy into the idea that abortion is a woman's health issue and not an issue with the God-created life. We buy into the idea that refugees shouldn't be taken care of. We look for the latest

psychological help, without looking to the true God for help. We listen to all sorts of evil.

Rarer still is our joy, prayer, and thanksgiving in times of trouble or evil. We're not joyful during times of trial and tribulation. How many are full of joy when the phone rings at 3 am or when the Cancer or Covid diagnosis comes? How many of are full of joy after 9 months of this Pandemic? We must note this though: Joy is different than happiness. We don't need to be happy, but we should still be joyful in Christ. I get it, it's hard to feel joy when things are troubling or when evil has befallen us.

We may pray...but when our prayers aren't being answered in our own way, we too easily despair and give up hope. I've been close to this before. I get it.

We can't imagine giving thanks during such evil times. Again...who has given God thanks for Covid or Cancer, for depression or disease or death of a loved one. Who has given God thanks for the many other evils that may come to us.

And when we willfully sin, we risk quenching the working of the Spirit in our lives. The Spirit continually works in our lives to move us to do just what Paul says here. When we intentionally refuse to do these things we thwart the work of the Spirit in us.

But God is ever faithful to make you holy in Christ Jesus. First, Christ Comes into the World as the Prince of Peace, and in His Spirit, soul, and body, he works holiness for you. He lived the holy life in the body, fulfilling all that God here commands you. He lived the perfect life for you. He withstood the temptation of Satan. By his Baptism by John, he "sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin." He served faithfully, healing the sick, casting out demons, teaching the kingdom of God, forgiving sins, and even raised the dead for three years. And after giving thanks on the night that he was betrayed, knowing what was coming, he gave to us the very sustenance of the sacrifice.

For the joy set before him and holding fast to the good result, Christ shed his holy, precious blood on the cross to make peace between God and all people.

He's the reason you have JOY! He's the reason you can have Joy even when you may not be happy.

Then, Christ sends his Spirit to make you Holy by His Gospel! Martin Luther summarizes the work of the Holy Spirit in this way in his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed:

Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions The Third Article: Sanctification

the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

He makes you holy through Holy Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. In Holy Absolution, He forgives you as Christ prayed even from the cross. Father, forgive them. He prophesies to you the holiness that is yours in Christ through the preaching of the Gospel.

He will surely keep you "blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Holy Spirit will remain faithful to the end to perfect you in holiness. As Luther states at the end of his explanation on the Third Article:

Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions The Third Article: Sanctification

On the Last Day He will raise up me and all the dead and will give eternal life to me and to all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

And even now! You have a foretaste of the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! The blameless and faithful Lamb of God comes and gives you his Holy Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. In this way, Christ gives into your body his very own holiness to assure you of your holiness in him. And he strengthens you in holy living.

Though you are not continuously faithful in this life, due to the weakness of your body and the fallenness of this world, you may indeed rejoice that He who came in the flesh is not only blameless, but also perfectly faithful to sanctify and keep you blameless in spirit and soul and body at his glorious and final advent.

Even amidst trying times you have been given joy, which allows you to rejoice ALWAYS. You have been given Joy in Jesus...born, lived, suffered, crucified, died, buried, and RISEN and the wonderful promise that He is coming back! Yes...you can rejoice, you can give thanks in all circumstances because Christ Jesus is in you and with you and has saved you!

In the name of Jesus, our Coming Advent King. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.