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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
December 12, 2021  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Philippians 4:4-7, Luke 3:7-18

Hymns: 70; 68; 66; 97:1,2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Zephaniah 3:14-18a

<sup>14</sup> Sing, O daughter of Zion!

Shout, O Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all *your* heart,

O daughter of Jerusalem!

<sup>15</sup> The LORD has taken away your judgments,

He has cast out your enemy.

The King of Israel, the LORD, *is* in your midst;

You shall see disaster no more.

<sup>16</sup> In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

“Do not fear;

Zion, let not your hands be weak.

<sup>17</sup> The LORD your God in your midst,

The Mighty One, will save;

He will rejoice over you with gladness,

He will quiet *you* with His love,

He will rejoice over you with singing.”

<sup>18</sup> “I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly.”

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God Incarnate, dear fellow Redeemed:

### INTRO: Rejoicing

People rejoice over many things. The stock market goes up, People rejoice! Your favorite football team wins! People rejoice! It doesn't always take much to initiate rejoicing among people in a city or a nation. But it is very transitory and superficial. What about the whole world rejoicing! Church bells rang across America at the end of the World War II. Can there be any greater cause for rejoicing than that? But surely there were nations that found little cause for rejoicing even then.

Our text today is a prophecy about the coming of the Lord Jesus. It speaks to us about the wonder of this event which we celebrate every Christmas, Jesus' birth, but it really extends beyond Jesus' birth to the greater significance of Jesus' coming. This isn't just a baby being born; this is the Christ, our Savior! Our text encourages us in seeing this as --

### **THEME: A Time for Rejoicing in Our Salvation.**

The opening verse of our text is quite emphatic: <sup>14</sup> *Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!* (v.14) Look at the repeated encouragement: Sing! Shout! Be glad and rejoice with **all your heart!** What powerful encouragement the Lord is giving us to joy and rejoicing!

This opening verse is directed to certain people. The terms used are “*daughter of Zion*” and “*daughter of Jerusalem.*” This isn't simply a figure of speech for the citizens of Jerusalem in the days of Zephaniah. In fact, the message Zephaniah was given for the citizens of Jerusalem and all Judah as well was a message of impending judgment. This message is directed to **the daughter of Zion** and **the daughter of Jerusalem**. This message is directed to the believers in days yet to come. This exhortation to rejoice is directed to **us**, the **Church** on earth in the days of fulfillment.

Now let's get back to the emphasis the Lord lays out here. This isn't a time for rejoicing one day a year, or over a single limited event. This is an encouragement to great celebration that continues

on and on and on. And with good reason! That is what the Prophet lays out for us. Rejoice because –

## **I. The Lord Has Taken Away Your Judgments.**

Listen again to this clear word of deliverance:

*“The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more.”* (v.15)

The judgments are the indictments of sin and guilt that were laid out against you. The great accuser is the devil himself. He takes great pleasure in pointing out our each and every transgression. He would torment our conscience with guilt, and then with fear and trembling over the judgment of death and condemnation which we rightly deserve. This is the devil’s power over us. First, he entices us to sin; with the assistance of our sinful flesh this is no big challenge. He quickly and easily overpowers us. He is far stronger and more wily than we are, do not delude yourself. Once we are tempted and fall into sin the devil will quickly inform our conscience not only that we are guilty, but we are phonies to boot. Our own heart condemns us, saying, *“No true Christian would sin against the Lord the way I have done. I am only fooling myself.”* That is the power of the enemy.

Do not despair, but rather rejoice! *“The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more.”* (v.15) God has set aside all charges and judgments against us! How is that possible? That is the wonder of Christmas grace. Paul wrote to the Colossians: *“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, <sup>14</sup>having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”* (Colossians 2:13-14) The work of salvation is from the Lord, completely from the Lord. We were dead in our trespasses and therefore incapable of helping ourselves even in the least bit. But the Lord took care of all the charges that have been laid out against us. The Lord nailed them to the cross of Christ. Jesus takes our sins and all judgments of guilt and condemnation away forevermore.

*“The King of Israel, the LORD is in your midst!”* (v.15) Jesus is in charge. This statement is so powerful. **Jesus is in charge!** He is the King. He is the Lord, the God of our salvation! He abides with us! That is the message of Advent. Jesus has come in the flesh, and He abides with us and dwells within our hearts. Take that to heart. Our enemy, the devil, is overcome by the power of the gospel! If your heart, if your conscience still struggles with this truth then remember these words of the Apostle John! *“By this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. <sup>20</sup> For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. <sup>21</sup> Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.”* (1 John 3:19-21) If your heart still feels guilty, believe God, who is greater than your heart. If your conscience is at peace recognize that as a blessing of faith.

Secondly, we are encouraged in our rejoicing --

## **II. The Lord is the Strength of Our Salvation.**

*“In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. <sup>17</sup> The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save.”* (v.16-17)

The world seems so powerful. In these last days we hear reports of persecution, and the gospel being banned in countries, and other countries making confessing Christ a crime. People are losing property and even their lives for the sake of the gospel. The world seems so powerful and cruel that the child of God may be tempted to shrink back in fear. Our text uses the expression, *“Let not your hands be weak.”* That very simply means we should not be so afraid that that we become limp in our faith and Christian life. We ought not feel like we are so weak that we can’t stand up to the world.

We ought not let the world dampen our joy and rejoicing. After all the Prophet has repeated that Advent truth once again that we might take heart! The Lord your God, our Savior Jesus Christ is in our midst. **Jesus is** with us, and **Jesus is all powerful to save.** Throughout history we have a record of the Lord delivering His people. The greatest deliverance was secured by Christ dying for

us on the cross. This same Jesus abides with us and is still and will always be **powerful to save!** Don't fear! *"Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth."* (Psalm 124:8)

All charges of sin against you have been dropped. You are safe in the Lord's hands Who is ever present to watch over you and protect you.

There is still more reason for rejoicing in this advent season of the year. And it has even more to do with the Lord being in our midst.

### **III. The Lord Rejoices Over You!**

*"He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."*<sup>18</sup> *"I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly."* (v.17-18)

The rejoicing over our salvation doesn't start with us. **It starts with the Lord!** As much singing and praising of the Lord as we ought to be doing this Advent and Christmas season, it will never even begin to compare with the rejoicing the Lord Himself expresses because of the salvation of His people. He has saved us from our sins. He has gathered us as His people. He has said, *"'You are My people!' And (we) shall say, 'You are my God!'"* (Hosea 2:23) For any and all who have felt as outcasts because of sin and the condemnation of the law, hear the Lord declare that He has gathered us to be His Church, His holy people. We, who by His grace and power have sorrowed over our sin, have now received from the Lord's own hand a double measure of grace for all our sins. God the Holy Spirit *"has called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified and keeps us in Jesus Christ in the one true faith."* (Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles Creed) **The Lord rejoices!**

This is not the Lord just looking at a mass of people that brings the Lord joy and rejoicing. He knows and care about each of us, and the eternal salvation of each individual believer brings Him joy and rejoicing! Remember these words of Jesus: *"I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* (Luke 15:10) Think of it as the Lord Himself throwing a celebration in the heavenly places! What would the occasion be for

the Lord to celebrate with singing and rejoicing? It isn't because somebody won the World Series or the Super Bowl. God celebrates the salvation of each and every sinner who turns away from sin and finds life and salvation in Jesus Christ. Think of that: the Lord rejoices in **your** salvation. How can that not bring joy and rejoicing to our hearts as well!

We love to sing the Christmas hymns and carols that proclaim the wonders God has done through Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem. It is how we rejoice in our salvation. Without doubt this Advent season is **“A Time for Rejoicing in our Salvation!”**

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)