



# still waters

home church studies

## Zephaniah 3.14-20

[Worship]

14 Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. 16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. 17 The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing 18 as on a day of festival. I will remove

disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. 19 I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. 20 At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD

2 Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. 3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. 4 And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. 5 Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. 6 Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 12.2-6

### Consider: Joy & Rejoicing —

[Words]

If the first two weeks of Advent focused on righteousness, the third is all about joy. Zephaniah, who promises the mercy of a loving God despite Israel's infidelity, prepares the community for celebration: "Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you.... He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love..." (Zephaniah 3.14,17). Isaiah too praises God's fidelity to Israel and alerts them to God's presence: "Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!" (Isaiah 12.6). Even in his letter to the Philippians, also known as "the letter of joy," Paul's preoccupations with God's coming judgment are replaced by the promise of mercy and peace: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.... Do not worry about anything.... And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4.4, 6-7). As an Advent people we too can rejoice, despite the fact that we don't fully understand the hows or whys of God's boundless love.

In contrast to the joyful and peaceful tone of the first readings comes a voice from the wilderness: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3.7). John doesn't mince words when it comes to God's impending incarnation. As the only author to connect John's activities to a calling from God, Luke places him squarely in line with the great Old Testament prophets, echoing the prophets' call to repentance. John warns his followers (and us) that ancestry, religious affiliation, and connections of any kind are of no importance; all that matters is that we "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3.8). Such fruits, as usual, have to do with justice: Share what you have, do not take advantage of power or authority, do not be greedy. These fruits are but a few ways we can show which god we worship, and that we are truly prepared to incarnate the peace that surpasses all understanding.

[Scripture]

## Philippians 4.4-7

4 **Rejoice** in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.