
Rejoice Sunday!

An article from the *Cathedral Times* by Dean Sam Candler

Those of you who heard my sermon last week, the Second Sunday of Advent, heard me say that I do not adhere to the tradition of Advent as a season of judgment. I realize, of course, that we all need judgment in our lives. Furthermore, judgment can—and should!—be understood as a positive and truthful event. Good judgment is a sign of positive truth!

However, to my mind, the advent of our Lord is better received with something like thanksgiving (as I said last Sunday) or even with something like joy!

On this coming Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent (and two Sundays before Christmas), the theme is much better. It happily happens that the epistle lesson assigned for this Sunday is a portion of Philippians, chapter 4. We have been reading Philippians in this Advent season, and last week I stressed Paul's attitude of thanksgiving in chapter 1. However, it is the theme of "joy" and "rejoicing" that rings even more strongly through Paul's letter to the Philippians. In four short chapters of that book, Saint Paul mentions "joy" or "rejoicing" some twenty times.

Ancient tradition uses Philippians 4:4-7 as the introit (sung opening passage) for this Third Sunday of Advent, a passage that begins, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!" In Latin, the word for "rejoice" is "Gaudete." Thus, tradition has accorded this Third Sunday of Advent the name, "Gaudete Sunday." It is meant to be a Sunday that stresses rejoicing (especially for those people who insist on the fearful judgmental nature of Advent!) This tradition is responsible for the rose-colored candle among the four candles on our Advent wreaths: the rose-colored candle, or pink candle, is for the rejoicing on the Third Sunday of Advent. We need a joy break!

In the Episcopal Church, we rarely sing introits at the Sunday morning Eucharist, but we have honored this ancient tradition in another way. In this Year C, we use Philippians 4:4-7 as our epistle lesson for the day. Alleluia! We get to rejoice during Advent!

I trust that each of you is enjoying this season. It can be hectic. It can be overdone. It can be sad. It can be anxious. It can be too much. But, ultimately, God wants us to enjoy it. We are preparing for the arrival of our God: Emmanuel, God-with-us. God may arrive dramatically, or God may arrive quietly. But God will arrive. That is reason to rejoice.

You can rejoice either wildly or softly. Either way. "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!"

