



ABOUT THE PROPERS

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Third Sunday in Advent

December 12, 2021



Rejoice in the Lord Always!

The Third Sunday in Advent is traditionally known as “*Gaudete*” Sunday. The Sunday derives its name from the Latin words of the Introit (opening verses) of the day: “Rejoice (*Gaudete*) in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). The focus of this morning’s readings, as well as the pink/rose Advent candle fit with the mood of the day: joy in Christ.

St. John the Baptist urged the people of his day to repent of their sins and to believe in the forgiveness of sins. John urged them to bring forth the fruits of repentance. They were to do this by forsaking their sinful ways and by bringing forth good works. John pointed the people to Christ, who would soon reveal himself to them, so that they could clearly know his divine power and mission and find joy in his work to save them.

The Propers

The Propers are those portions of the service that change (or, are “proper” to) each Sunday or season of the church year. The Propers differ from the Ordinary (from the Latin ordo, which means “regular order”) portions of the liturgy, which do not change (e.g. the Lord’s Prayer). The Propers offer the variety to the worship service and emphasize particular worship themes throughout the liturgical calendar.

First Lesson¹ Zephaniah 3:14-17

What bright words in the midst of the darkness of Old Testament judgment! On this Sunday of rejoicing, God speaks words of most tender love. The promise that brings rejoicing points to the real source of our salvation: not our repentance, but our Savior God. The God of free and faithful love is with his people to save them, to take away their punishment, to turn back their enemy. See the unbelievable nature of our God. Though we need a message of repentance and coming judgment, God loves us anyway—more than that: he delights in us! And grace of grace, God rejoices over us. Let us rejoice together!

Second Lesson¹ Philippians 4:4-7

As we anticipate the coming deliverance, Paul says, “Rejoice always,” for “the Lord is near.” Let our Advent joy be expressed in prayer and thanksgiving that stem from God’s peace, given us in his transcendent gift of his Son as our Savior. So many parts of this sorted world seek to rob our joy in Christ. No wonder Paul told us twice: “I say it again, Rejoice!”

Gospel of the Day¹ Luke 3:7-18

The Gospel continues the account of John the Baptist. John minced no words in his message, neither to those hypocrites who did not want to listen to John’s call to repentance nor to those believers who heeded John’s call and desired to change their ways. So near is the Lord’s judgment that the ax man has already placed his blade on the trunk to line up his first swing. Yet with repentance comes good news: the winnowing fork in his hand does more than expose the chaff in the winds of judgment; it gathers the wheat into his barn.

Psalm of the Day Psalm 130

We can rejoice as we wait for Judgment Day because we know that the Lord has forgiven our sins. We put our hope in him who lifts us out of the depths of despair.

Verse of the Day

Matthew 11:10

Speaking to his disciples, who were sent by John the Baptist to ask if Jesus was “the one to come,” Jesus confirmed his identity as the promised Messiah. He then pointed to the Baptist as the one prophesied by Malachi (3:1), who would be sent ahead of the Messiah to prepare his way (quoted by Jesus in Matthew 11:10). Jesus points to John who points to Christ and his work to save us.

Prayer of the Day

Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus Christ, and come with the good news of your mighty deliverance. Drive the darkness from our hearts and fill us with your light; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Hymn of the Day

14 “Arise O Christian People” (Valentin Thilo, 1607-1662)

The hymnist calls believers to “prepare to greet the Savior, who takes your sins away” (v1). This preparation is made when we “cast out what would offend him” (v2), and trust in his forgiveness. We are reminded us this preparation is our Lord’s work in us (v4), and he delights in it (v3).

Church Year Season^{1 & 2}

Advent

While most of the world marks the passage of time from January through December, Christians have kept their own calendar for centuries. This Christian year is a way of remembering key events in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

In Advent, the first season of the Church Year, the Word of God bids us prepare for the coming of Christ. The readings for Advent have this urgency to them: Since he is surely coming again in judgment, we desperately need for him to come to us first in grace. For without that coming in grace we will perish at his coming in judgment. The Prayer for the Day on each Sunday in Advent is especially beautiful, worth repeating perhaps in the sermon introduction or highlighting in the worship folder. These ancient prayers were said by many of the faithful even during the week when children would take turns reciting them as they lit the candle(s) on the Advent Wreath.

The threefold focus of Christ’s coming to us is as follows:

- Jesus arrived once as a baby in Bethlehem, coming near to humanity to save us. Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas.
- Jesus arrives here among us today through his Word, in Holy Baptism and in Holy Communion, to forgive us and strengthen us.
- Jesus will arrive in glory at the end of this world. We look forward to that day with excitement because Jesus has already come and prepared us for it.

Colors & Symbolism

Advent: Blue

The traditional color for Advent is purple. Advent is a penitential season of preparation for Christmas; thus the color purple which symbolizes sorrow and repentance (along with royalty). Since another theme of Advent is hope and anticipation, the color blue (the sky) has come to be used in many churches to symbolize the believer’s hope and expectation of Jesus’ Second Coming.

Traditions & Customs²

The Advent Wreath

A tradition of the Advent season is the lighting of candles on a wreath. Each light reminds us of Jesus, the Light of the world (John 8:12). Each Sunday we light an additional candle, providing a visual countdown to the celebration of Christ’s birth. On Christmas Eve we light the center candle, remembering Jesus’ nativity and the light and life that he brings (John 1:4,9).

Nain Paraments

Advent

Superfrontal: “Come Lord Jesus” is the Advent (meaning “coming” or “arrival”) prayer of Christians who await Christ’s promised return (Revelation 22:7,12,20) on the Last Day (Revelation 22:17,20), and who desire to eagerly receive Jesus now in the Gospel. The stars are representative of the Church’s anticipation of Jesus’ return when he will “appear in the sky...with great power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). The stars also remind us of God’s creative work. They especially remind us of Jesus, the bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16) and Light of the World (John 8:12) who came to save us from the darkness of sin and death.

Lectern antependium: Chi (X) and Rho (P) are the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ (Χριστός). This ancient symbol represents Jesus and his office as the Messiah, the anointed King of kings and Savior of the world (Matthew 16:16).

Pulpit antependium: Alpha (A) and Omega (Ω) are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. These two letters symbolize Jesus Christ, our eternal Lord and Savior, who is the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author; Jonathan E. Schroeder, Editor.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author and Editor.

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