

### **Reflection for Advent 3: - Gaudete Sunday 2020**—By Rev'd Peter Shaw

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent - it is also known in the Western Church, both Protestant and Catholic, as gaudete Sunday. The word gaudete comes from the Latin verb gaudere – to rejoice.

In the pre-reformation church, the third Sunday in Advent was kept as a day of joy to remind the faithful in the middle of their Advent preparation and repentance, that a day of great joy was to come – the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Advent in many ways is similar to Lent, but with one fundamental difference: whereas in Lent, the overriding theme is repentance, during Advent there is still repentance but in addition, there is an expectation, anticipation - and indeed preparation for - the birth of our loving Saviour Jesus Christ.

Gaudete Sunday is still in the Church's liturgical calendar today, although rarely mentioned, which I think is a shame; In these days of penance and preparation leading up to the feast of our Saviour's birth, Gaudete Sunday reminds us of the joy that is to come, and serves, amid this season of repentance, as a kind of 'break' when we recall the joy, born of the hope of salvation that we have, because of the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ – In fact, the pink candle on our Advent wreath signifies Gaudete Sunday and the glimpse of joy we have through it.

The church experiences a flash of joy, of eager expectation, in the midst of its Advent repentance. We are invited to share that flash of joy too - the joy and anticipation of what is to come in the midst of our repentance. At this time of pandemic, exacerbating the difficulties and suffering we all can face on life's journey this glimpse of joy is even more poignant and welcome.

Isaiah (12.2-end) reflect that joy, tells us:

***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.***

***With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.***

***And you will say on that day:***

***Give thanks to the Lord,  
call on his name;***

***make known his deeds among the nations;  
proclaim that his name is exalted.***

***Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be known in all the earth.***

***Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.***

Powerful and beautiful words indeed!

God will give us the means of transformation ready to make the journey – our way forward in how we lead our lives – our road - the road we need to take for our redemption - will be clearly visible in front of us - for it will be a highway, a road on a causeway, it will be

unmistakable in its surroundings, it will be clear to us, we will not be able to miss it – again Isaiah tells us:

***A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it,  
but it shall be for God's people;***

Isaiah tells us that with this Highway, God is giving us the means of renewal for our journey – eternal salvation - God's work of salvation will make His people new.

So it is for us on our own journey through life. We journey through the year, with life throwing at us all sorts of difficulties through ill health, and other difficult circumstances - in all our human weakness. Sometimes we feel oppressed, worn down by life, perhaps a little like the Israelites must have felt when they were in exile in Babylon.

But God is providing us with the means of renewal, of eternal salvation, a highway along which to travel, for at this very special time of year, we are rapidly approaching the time in the church's year when we can see something beautiful, quite outstanding, quite remarkable approaching, a cause for great celebration – the coming of our means of redemption – the birth of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So, in these days of Advent, let us reflect on our lives so far, repent of all our sins, prepare ourselves to welcome the Baby Jesus into our midst, but vitally important as those things are, let us also start to joyfully think about the events that we are about to celebrate - one of the greatest events in the history of the human race, God sending His only Son to be with us, to take human form and share our lives with us, to show us the way, along God's Highway - the Holy Way - to the Promised Land, to eternal life shared with Him, where as Isaiah tells us:

***And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. AMEN***