

**REFLECTIONS FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT ~ 11 December 2022**  
**The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale**

**Be joyful ~ Be patient** – these two wonderful commandments are embedded in our readings in today’s Liturgy of the Word. Not only do we hear the two commandments, but we are expected to hold them together! In our tradition, the focus on joy in the readings and in the words of the entrance antiphon (“Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice” – Phil 4:4) gives the name for this day in Advent, *Gaudete Sunday* (“Gaudete” is Latin for “Rejoice”). The presider at Mass will wear rose-coloured not purple vestments, and the candle on the Advent Wreath will be rose-coloured, both celebrating in joy. While in the past we would have seen the season of Advent (like the season of Lent) as a time of penitence (imaged by purple), in recent times, we have been encouraged to attend to the true theme of waiting, a period for joyful expectation.



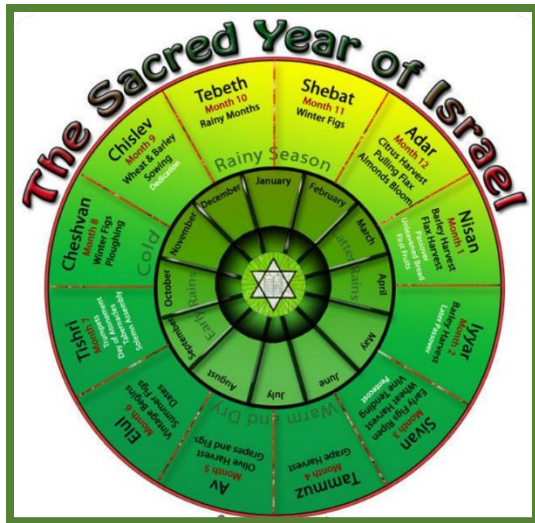
The first reading from Isaiah gives us images of two groups who are joyful and patient. The first comes from the other-than-human creation, “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing” (Is 35:1-2). The winter crocus grows after Israel’s long, hot summer, one of the earliest plants to bloom. A tiny plant, it stands as a powerful symbol in its ability to withstand the drought of summer. When you see the crocus, you know that the rains and new life are coming.

The second image in the reading comes from the human creation, “The lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. 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” (Is 35:6, 10). Both groups are marginalized and vulnerable. Both groups rejoice now because of new life which will come in the future.

Psalms 146, which begins the last set of psalms in that book of the Old Testament, echoes the same theme, “It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous” (Ps 146:6-8). The promise of a God who cares for the weakest and most at risk among us is a source of hope and joy and a resource for patient waiting.

The reading from the letter of James highlights the commandment of patience, repeating the word three times in two verses, “Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient” (Jam 5:7-8). The letter reflects the same focus on rain nourishing the whole of creation as does Isaiah and as promised in Deuteronomy, “The land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year” (Deut 11:10-12).

Early and late rains were and are central to the life of Israel – one sign of their importance is the many Hebrew names for rain. *Yoreh* refers to early rains in October after the hot dry summer – these rains are sent down to soften up the ground, ready for the first round of planting. *Melkosh*



refers to later rains, the downpours in January and February that more easily penetrate the softer ground and bring forth the second planting harvest in the Spring.

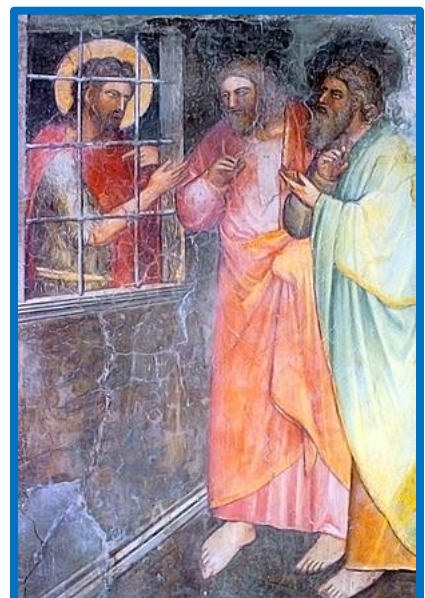
We read in Joel 2:23, “O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God who has given the early rain for your vindication and has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before.” *Geshem* is the word usually used for rain in Israel today. The three letter root for the word *geshem* is also the root for the word *lehitgashem* which means to fulfill or realize something – making something come into being that was not, the way that rain causes things to sprout up into life from shrivelled, buried and invisible seeds. God can call into existence things

that only exist in seed form – the seeds of word and promises, “Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord whose appearing is as sure as the dawn, who will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth” (Hos 6:3).

“Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?” – with these words, John shows his uneasiness that Jesus is not behaving as the people and he had expected the Messiah to act; he was not a mighty king or warrior or priest. John had spoken with confidence at Jesus’ baptism. “I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. . . Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’” (Matt 3:11, 13-14). The Lutheran pastor, Karoline Lewis, speaks to John’s unease, finding an application for us today:

This week, John the Baptist is in a new place. He’s gone from wilderness to pent-up-ness. From freedom to confinement. From wide-open spaces to the captivity of a cell. A change of place causes a change of perspective. No longer in the wilderness, no longer baptizing in the Jordan River, no longer having people come to him, John is now in a different desert, no longer prophesying but questioning, with people likely positioning themselves as far away from him as possible.

When you are imprisoned, your questions change. When you are captive, your yearnings change. When your freedom to roam has been taken away, you then have an altered sense of freedom, perhaps — the freedom to ask questions you have not risked asking before, you have not dared to voice, or you have been told you should not utter. . . Ask it together — not to answer it, not to solve it, not to tie it all up in a Christmas bow, but to lean in to the waiting, the wanting, and the wonder so as to hear God’s answer.



**John the Baptist in Prison**  
Giousto de Menabuoi (1320-1391)

Jesus' response echoes the words from Isaiah 35 (4-5), "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." The spiritual writer, Debie Thomas, builds on Jesus' words, seeing not only Jesus as the unexpected Messiah but also seeing the ones who most clearly show us the face of Jesus as the unexpected ones, "John's journey is a backwards one. From certitude to doubt. From boldness to hesitation. From knowing to unknowing. From heavenly light to jail cell darkness. . . The reality of who Jesus is emerges in the lives of the plain, poor, ordinary people all around us. We glimpse his reality in shadows. We hear it in whispers. It comes to us by stealth, with subtlety, over long, quiet stretches of time."

Advent is certainly a time for patience and for joy, for hope in the unexpected, for trust that Jesus is God-with-us. For those who are following the Cosmic Advent Wreath, this third Sunday of Advent centres on the birth of Jesus the Christ, in the words of Teilhard de Chardin, "Christ and Jesus are not exactly the same. In Jesus, God's presence became more obvious and believable in the world. By his incarnation (the Christ) inserted himself not just into our humanity, but into the universe which supports humanity. The presence of the incarnate word . . . shines at the heart of all things." Our prayer this week, as we light our red candle, comes from another Jesuit, John Kavanaugh, as he invites us to "bear Christ ever newly":



Come, Risen Christ, Incarnate Love. Today, as we light the candle of the birth of Jesus the Christ, we pray to "fall in love once again with the Great Mystery of God's care for us – Divine Incarnation so deep and long – as to take on our bodied lives as God's very own, even our most humble beginnings and endings, and finally, see each day as opportunity to bear Christ ever newly." Come, waken us to love.

We began our Liturgy of the Word with Earth trusting and rejoicing that Earth "shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God" (Is 35:2). Let us end with the same joy and trust and hope and patience reflected in this prayer-poem of Steve Garnaas-Holmes:

*Blossoming desert*

The desert shall rejoice and blossom.

Isaiah 35.1

Earth knows.

We have put her to hard labor,  
taking her jewels, stripping her naked,  
enslaving her under our callous appetite.  
She mourns in drought, swoons with fever,  
drops her glaciers like glass fallen and shattered.

She too is on this faltering journey toward the Promise.

She too longs for vision long denied.

Yet she will not withhold. She will provide.

For she too is Word made flesh.

In the joy of her Maker,

exultant in the presence of the Great Love,

she will flourish, as grace does.

Already the pines reach down, strong and confident,  
the beetle priests enter their secret sanctuary,  
every pilgrim bird, every angel fungus  
loves their song of glory and is ready to burst forth.  
Even deserts that have never known luxury  
wait, debutantes, ready, unafraid.  
No one has more hope than earth herself.  
She will love us through this.

*Weather Report*

A perfect day,  
perhaps not today or tomorrow  
but in Earth's time, soon.  
Ample sun and rain,  
the breeze of Love breathing its joy,  
and every species  
giving and receiving.



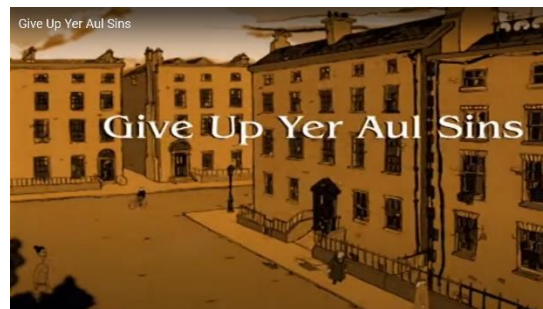
**Israeli Desert in Bloom**

In this third week of Advent, let us rejoice in this present moment, waiting with patience for God's word to come in ever new and creative ways just as God has come in the incarnation in the cosmos, in Earth and Earth beings, and in the person of Jesus the Christ. Blessings of joy this week as we journey into the time of Christmas, as we bear Christ ever newly!

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In the spirit of this Sunday of Rejoicing, I invite you to watch again videos which you have seen before. The first is done by children from New Zealand and shows us God in heaven considering sending the Son to Earth – a wonderful retelling of the story of the Incarnation of Jesus. The second is the telling of the story of John the Baptist by a little girl in a classroom in Dublin (listen carefully since her accent is not always easy to understand). Just cut and paste the websites.

**<https://youtu.be/TM1XusYVqNY>**  
**An Unexpected Christmas**



**<https://youtu.be/TxotrR3KQwU>**  
**The Birth of John the Baptist - Give Up Yer Aul Sins**