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This Third Sunday of Advent is called Gaudete (rejoice) Sunday. Pope Francis has consistently called us to live with joy, most especially in his apostolic exhortation "[The Joy of the Gospel](#)," in which we find the word *joy* 110 times.

Zephaniah, who proclaims joy to us today, is of the "minor prophets." All we really know about him is that he's the son of Cushi, a name that comes from Ethiopia, and that he lived around 600 B.C. To put his message into context, it's good to note that before the passage we hear today, Zephaniah predicted that God would choose a faithful remnant who would be the future of the chosen people. This remnant, called the *anawim*, were "a people humble and lowly" (Zephaniah 3:12-13). It's to these poor and faithful people that God says, "Rejoice!"

Although we know little about him, Zephaniah presents us with a remarkable image of God. He depicts God as One whose very nature it is to forgive, "The Lord has removed the judgment against you [and] is in your midst." Then comes the greatest novelty of Zephaniah's image of God: "[God] will rejoice over you with happy song, renew you by love, [and God] will dance with shouts of joy for you as on a day of festival ([Zephaniah 3:17-18](#)).

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Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18

What a picture! God, so in love with humanity that divine joy explodes into dance. Rejoice!

Long before this, when Moses gave the people the Law around 1300 B.C., God told the chosen people, "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" ([Leviticus 19:2](#)). God's dance and command to be holy portray God's desire for an ever-deeper relationship with humanity, a relationship that gives joy to both sides ([John 17:20-21](#)) This leads

us to Luke's presentation of how John the Baptist described the concrete implications of being holy.

Luke tells us that when soldiers and tax collectors came to John, he instructed them to do their work with integrity and respect. He didn't expect to turn selfish or bullying people into instant saints. Even a little change of their ways would help others immensely and, by changing their behavior, they were on the road to more.

Some ordinary people took John's message to heart and asked what they should do. This group mirrored the *anawim*, people whose hope was the greatest wealth they possessed. To them, John said: "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the one who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise."

While that sounds excessively demanding of the poor, it's probably what they were already doing. Very often, those who have almost nothing act with special compassion for others who have little or less than they.

These people demonstrate the freedom that Paul recommended to the Philippians. The ability to give from their want frees them from anxiety. They know and show by the way they behave that the good news is happening in their midst.

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Paul was teaching the Philippians how to pray as a community whose life presents good news to the poor. Paul tells them to pray with thanksgiving and to ask for what they need because they know that a praying community will do everything possible to ensure the good of all.

As a community grows in kindness, they will increasingly know "the peace that surpasses all understanding." They may not get everything they want — or even need — but being part of a praying community will keep their minds and hearts in union with Christ. That will bring them joy, no matter the circumstances.

What about us? Acting a bit gentler John the Baptist, Pope Francis tells us, "The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience." He addresses this to all of us: the *anawim*, business owners and soldiers, pastors and plumbers, migrants and

refugees, young and old, absolutely everyone alive today.

Francis teaches that if we want to experience the joy of the Gospel and union with God, we need to begin by sharing God's concern for the poorest among us. Francis calls us to mourn at the scandal of the fact that millions starve while Earth provides enough food for everyone. He invites us to dream of a world in which all people enjoy love, nutrition, education, health care and dignified employment.

Today, the Baptist and Pope Francis urge us to seek real joy. John tells us to begin with moral integrity. Then, as we grow in awareness of God in our midst, the scandals of poverty and war will move us to work for remedies, no matter the cost.

That will bring joy to God and neighbor — and even to us!

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