



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER  
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH  
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

**SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Introduction to the Word:**

Our message series called “The Gift Exchange” builds upon the reality that this is one of the busiest time of the whole year. The hectic pace can even make it hard to enjoy and manage the numerous expectations and demands placed on us. These can become “obligations” instead of “opportunities”. Our series is dedicated to discerning together how to make our “yes” to the numerous requests we receive, a response build upon the *best one we can make, all the difference so* that is to set our priorities on God. But that response can get crowded out by all the other “yeses” we’re making. How do we make our first “Yes” the best. Our message series will be all about setting priorities for the season and celebrating Christmas well.



**Warm-Up:**

- Share in your small group some of the occasions that prompt you to “rejoice,” e.g. a word or a happening that adds a spark to your life, or puts a spring in your step, or puts a smile on your face. It is these little things that work together to help us be mindful of Paul’s passionate exhortation **to rejoice**

**CALL TO PRAYER (5 MINUTES)**

Leader: One mightier than John the Baptist is coming to baptize us with fire.

**Lord Jesus**, our Emmanuel – God-with-us,  
**Christ Jesus**, Root of Jesse and Key of David,  
**Lord Jesus**, Radiant Dawn of our birth,

**Lord, have mercy.**  
**Christ, have mercy.**  
**Lord, have mercy.**

**Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:**



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*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,  
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart  
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit  
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.  
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in name of  
Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

### **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME** (45 minutes)

(Please select one person –not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below.)

#### **FIRST READING (Baruch 5:1–9)**

Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting; for God will show your splendour everywhere under heaven. For God will give you evermore the name, “Righteous Peace, Godly Glory.” Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God’s command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### **SECOND READING (Philippians 1:3-6, 8–11)**

Brothers and sisters, I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the Gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### **GOSPEL (Luke 3:1–6)**

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the Prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the



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wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

*(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)*

### COMMENTARY:

[Your group may wish to listen again to the Audio of the Lord’s Day Message](#)

[At this point please use the video Message for this series – Week #2](#)

Briefly stated, Advent is *shouting out* to all people and all nations: “*The Incarnation is still happening right now.*” At this very moment in time, God is being “*God for us*”—a dynamic, creative, compassionate and forgiving God. Our Scripture resource people today—the prophet Baruch and Paul and Luke—are asking us to see the world and its history not at its worst but rather at its potential best, as being disposed for a great transformation, as reflecting God’s deepest compassion, as finding every strategy for peace and justice worth the attempt. And, most importantly, to find our own place in God’s would-be *transformers of the world*. Along with a keen awareness of what God has done for us in choosing to dwell in our midst, we recognize a corresponding call to pick up the gauntlet and help complete what Jesus has begun, i.e., building up the reign of God.

Paul continues with much the same thought in his letter. Again the message to his community is clearly a message to today’s world, to not give in to the negative elements that surround us. Paul seems to be saying here that genuine joy is the resultant gift that flows from our unselfish attention and service to others, and when we open our minds and hearts to God and others in this fashion, we are assured of a peace and a joy that is beyond all understanding.

John the Baptizer was recognized as a prophet, even the hoped-for Messiah, but he was not interested in his popularity or success as he pointed always to the one who was to come, the one whose sandals he was not worthy to tie. By today’s standards, what an uncommon thing for John to do with *power*—to lay it down! Renouncing power, to be lifted up to a new kind of relationship with the Almighty, a power for good, forgetting self.

This is key to the gift exchange. For us to be open to the best “yes” toward the Lord then we must not only be people of perspective (as last week we discussed), but people of humble prayerful perspective. A lack of prayerful perspective leads us to believe that our “busyness” is THE busyness. That our tasks are THE most important which leads to a selfishness which takes us away from the road which leads to the building of the Kingdom of God.



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It is as St Paul in his letter to Philippians put it “ *I am confident of this, that the one who began good work in you will bring it completion.*” What we are always about – even in busyness – is His work. Our best Yes (to God’s will) not only gives us perspective in prayer, but it gives us power and strength to accomplish all the other “yeses.” It is after all, His Birthday, should we not take time to find out His wish for us and this Season.

The Second Sunday of Advent is not a time of “double trouble”, extra pressure because the looming date of Christmas is near, no it is a time to seek “double grace” so that we can accomplish all that needs to be done with His grace as our strength as we continue to build His kingdom. After all, this season is not meant to bring you to the brink of exasperation...but to the point of exaltation - seeing the marvels of God - that is what Isaiah and Paul are saying - see the Glory of God. But we can only look for the marvels and the glory of God if we are inviting His grace (prayer) and seeking His strength (perspective). That is the power of the Gift Exchange!

At times however we are the barrier to that exchange, for we get caught up in our “to do” and not on the first Yes. A few simple ways around that are to establish a plan, where you undertake a good deed each day, an extra act of patience, where you force yourself to say a nice word and you engage in a simple extra 15 minutes of quiet prayer These will stop you from selfishness and give you prayerful perspective in His work – after all that is what the season, and our life of Discipleship, is about – His work. It is our part in the Gift Exchange.

**Message this week** – Are you overwhelmed by all the Yeses you have given to things to be done that your best Yes (the one to God) has been forgotten? Is the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Advent turning into “double trouble”? Instead seek ways for it to be a time of “double grace”.

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion:** (15-20 minutes)

- When was the last or a recent time you could feel God nudging or directing you towards a specific decision? How did you respond?
- Read aloud Luke 1:38. Mary proclaims she is God’s servant and will do whatever He wills. What are your reactions to this verse?

### **Closing Prayer** (15-20 minutes)

*(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. You may wish to create and add petitions of prayer at this time. This time also intent to provide moments to connect and “outreach” to the larger community.)*



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*GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:*

- The Red Stocking Campaign and Kindness Counts Campaign are underway – how will your group be involved?
- Our Day of Mercy (all day confessions) is on December 10<sup>th</sup> from 8:30am-8:30pm. Twelve Hours, Twelve Confessors. Consider setting aside time to join us for this evening.

Let us pray (together)

*Lord our God, already in our midst and yet to come,  
your presence delights us even now as we long for your peace.*

*Winnow from our lives the chaff of selfishness and sin. Sow in us a harvest  
of gentleness and generosity, for we rejoice in you, even as you exult and sing for joy over us.*

*Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who was, who is and who is to come,  
your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever. Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favors on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray united as one,

**OUR FATHER...**

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