



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

**THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT**

**December 13<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:**

- What are you preparing for this Christmas?
- Do you have any hopes for you and your family this Advent and Christmas season?

**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:**

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,*



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

*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** (Zephaniah 3:14–18a)

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love. The Lord, your God, will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### **SECOND READING** (Philippians 4:4–7)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything let your requests be made known to God by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### **GOSPEL** (Luke 3: 10–18)

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

The crowds, who were gathering to be baptized by John, asked him, “What should we do?” In reply John said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” So, with many other exhortations, John proclaimed the good news to the people. The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**



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

*(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 #3](#)

Let's review where we have been: Week # 1 – “Don't Waste the Wait”. The goal of Advent is not a Behemoth experience but a Blessed experience. While we wait, He works and calls us to clearer moments of understanding His will. Week # 2 – it's not about “Double Trouble, but Double Grace.” We are called *not to give into the busyness*, but to depend on God's grace to strengthen us. When we take the time to make our best “Yes” first to Him in prayer (and make time for prayer in our busyness), then it allows all of our other “yesses” to be sources of inspiration not perspiration.

Now it's Week # 3 and we are called to Rejoice – to Joy, but not a joy that is for a season or a moment, but a joy that lets us accept that even in the busyness He wishes us to lead abundant, fulfilled lives. But for this to happen we need to learn from the scriptures of today three traits.

As we look at today's world, our present times are not unlike those that the prophet Zephaniah describes in the First Reading. So many people without moral boundaries, so many whose sole sense of service is to themselves! Yet, despite these unhealthy realities, we too are asked “to shout and sing, be glad, and lift up our hearts.” We are called to rejoice in our *God because our God rejoices in us*. Note the priority here – God *first* rejoices in us! So our first call is to looking for the greatest good to embrace that love – **Discernment**. We can't do it all, there are too many tasks to be accomplished (and most of them are good), so our first goal must be to not only do good, but seek the greatest good! For this to be so, we must discern (prayerfully discuss with God) what will lead us to a Joy rooted in His will.

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 but rooted in **Gentleness**. Peace with ourselves and God's will shows itself in gentleness. Aggressiveness demonstrates anger or unease, gentleness expresses peace. Joy is found in peace. This peace comes when we are determined to not lose our perspective on our purpose in the midst of the preparation. So our second goal is Gentleness. **When we have discerned, and we know our purpose, gentleness follows**. If we live our lives in a spirit of gentleness then we find peace and this brings joy!



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

John the Baptizer lived this, and was recognized as a prophet, even the hoped-for Messiah, and he earned a following and was asked, “Teacher, what should we do?” People today ask the same agonizing question of the Lord. People then and now often feel swayed and manipulated by social, cultural, economic, and even religious forces. Some ache to be saved by some charismatic leader, or turn to self-help books or TV personalities with a simple message as to how to live a decent life. How does one remain right in God’s eyes when so many forces seem to rob people of their autonomy and freedom to respond? The answer of the Baptist was very simple: think of others and share what you have — food, clothing and everything else. These words are as valid and urgent today as they were then. Even the hated and despised tax-collectors and soldiers (both notorious for “supplementing their income” through extortion and selling protection) asked the same question. John’s response: do your job well but with mercy, justice and compassion; do not extort money from people and be content with what you have. There was no need for radical renunciation or extreme religious practices; simple justice and compassion would suffice – what a message in the Year of Mercy.

This teaching anticipated something greater to come — Jesus the Messiah — and the gift of the Spirit of God that He would bring. Just as the mission of John the Baptist was to prepare the coming of the Lord by raising the spiritual consciousness of the people, our own compassionate response to others makes possible the greater work of God in us and on our behalf. Teacher, what should we do? The answer is simple and clear - **forgetting self**.

This third week of Advent invites us to develop in our life Discernment so that we choose the most life giving “Yeses”. It calls us to gentleness so that we can achieve peace and it calls us to forgetting self so that we may live lives of service to others which gives us perspective, which in turn, leads to Joy. The beauty of this part of the Gift Exchange is that it is about learning these skills in the midst of the menu of options before us, so that we experience Joy not for a Sunday, or a season, but for our entire lives. These are not just Advent habits – but life habits!

*Message this week – Want Joy – seek Peace!*

*(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)

- Don’t you feel that you can sometimes lose perspective on the goal in the midst of preparation? If so, when does that tend to happen to you? What are ways you stay focused on your primary purpose?
- Does it feel like helping and serving others is an “add-on” to the Christmas season? What are some ways to integrate service to your schedule in these last days leading up to Christmas?



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

- Discuss some things you can say “no” to that you don’t really need, so that others can have things they really do need this Christmas. Are there any needs within your small group that you can help each other with?

### **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.)*

#### **GROUP PRAYER/ ACTION:**

While there will be a Week 4 of our message series, given that many of our Heart to Home groups are not meeting until the New Year this will be the final Small Group resource for 2015. Thank you for being a part of Heart to Home Small Groups and for making Sunday Matter all week long. Merry Christmas and true Happiness and Peace for 2016!

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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