

# CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

3rd Sunday of Advent | For Sunday, December 16th, 2018

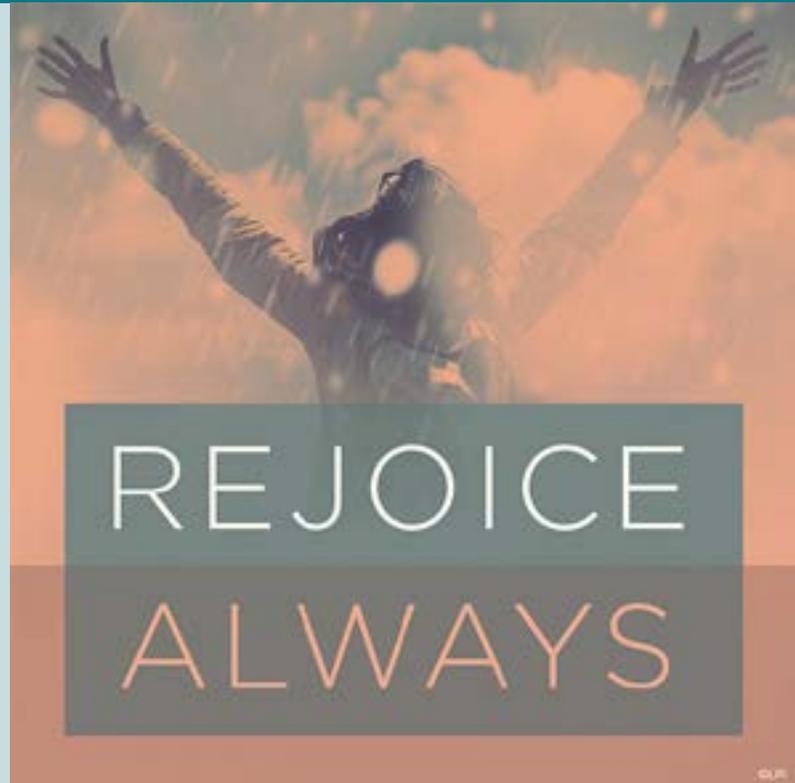
## The Gift of Advent

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:10-18



The last couple of weeks have presented us with an opportunity to stop, listen, reflect, and focus. Today, we are called to rejoice! "Cry out with joy and gladness: for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel." We need more Advent time in our lives. In his exhortation, "[The Joy of the Gospel](#)," Pope Francis remarks, "Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades."

In order to recognize the incarnate Holy One of God in the simplicity of a manger bed, we have to journey for a while through the dark, holy, quiet, and ordinary night. We press on, seeking and hoping to find something profound, completely different, life-changing, and light-giving. We want joy! We all want to feel that certain something that presents itself as a light, however sometimes dim it flickers in the midst of life's most heart-wrenching moments. A light that spurs us onward can still cause us to smile and have hope in the middle of despair, reminding us that we are loved.

It's too easy today to remove ourselves from people. We get involved with our agendas, our gadgets, our world of faceless names and contacts, demands, obligations, work, and basic stuff. It is no wonder we are robbed of joy and even deadened to our thirsting need for it. Even after Mary was asked to do the most incredible of things, she said, "My spirit rejoices in God my savior!" We begin to experience joy when we empty ourselves into the life of another, when we sit with them when they are lonely, walk with them in their pain, hold them in their grief, and show them that, at least at this moment, they are more important than anything or anyone else in our lives. Profound encounters such as these are only possible when we are comfortable in our own skin and comfortable in "God's skin!" Pope Francis goes on to say that "the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to."

Several years ago, I made frequent trips to Argentina. While an absolutely beautiful country with beautiful people, its landscape gives witness to the prevalent presence of abject poverty. Outside my hotel lived a family of four in a box. The box, which was clearly their home, was carefully positioned on a very busy Buenos Aires street. Jose was a precocious three-year-old who was filled with joy. Every time I came back to the hotel, we would sit and play in the street, and I would bring the family some food. His family had absolutely nothing except a few simple possessions. Even though life was incredibly difficult for them, they all had a light within that continued to flicker through their darkness. Spending time with them was a life-changing experience for me.

In an attempt to hold onto and protect our “stuff,” we can often become so self-absorbed that we lose sight of what is really important and what our hearts really need. We lose touch with our desire for God and our need to profoundly connect with one another. These encounters need to be in-person encounters and not things we find on a Facebook chat or with “friends” we have never actually met. We need simple, sacred moments where we put all of our other things aside to sit, play, hope, watch, love, admire, and wait with God, others, and even ourselves. We need to make room for these sacred Advent moments.

We rejoice today because we know that we are profoundly and unconditionally loved by God. This is not knowledge just of the mind but of the heart. When we discover it, embrace it, and live by it, we find ourselves surprised by joy even when we are consumed with sorrow. Here are a few questions to ponder as our Advent time winds down: How often do you laugh each day? (I am not speaking just about a little chuckle but a full, heartfelt laugh.) When was the last time you spent a few moments quietly waiting with someone who was hurting? Have you ever looked into the eyes of someone who is impoverished and embraced them? What are you expecting to find at the manger? What do you think you will experience, personally and internally, when Christ comes again? Has waiting become any easier for you as you get older?

We cannot remain on the surface of life. It will destroy us. We have to learn how to drink deeply of life’s wellsprings and stir up and listen to the desires God places in our hearts. They are desires for God’s presence and an experience of intense and lasting joy. If we really desired and possessed joyful hearts, nothing can ever rob us of that eternal flame burning within.

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## PRAYER

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his Name.  
He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.  
He has shown the strength of his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.  
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones  
and has lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
He has come to the help of his servant Israel  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his children forever.

— *The Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55)