

ADVENT: IN FAITH WE WAIT EXPECTANTLY FOR THE LORD

Third Sunday in Advent

December 17, 2006

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

Preparing for the Celebration

Don't worry! Be happy! Let's celebrate!

These are definitely welcome words at this time in our history. How can we not worry? As we look around, it appears that evil is triumphing over good. It seems as if, in the words of the psalmist, "the wicked sprout and spread like grass" (Psalm 92:7a, *CEV*) as wars and rumors of wars engulf our world. Yet, the Scriptures encourage us to "celebrate and shout," to put away our troubles and our fears because God, who is always with us, will refresh our life with his love (Zephaniah 3:14-17). And, we who belong to Christ Jesus, will be blessed "with peace that no one can completely understand" (Philippians 4:7a, *CEV*).

Peace! What a comforting thought. These Scriptures echo the angel's pronouncement in Luke's gospel, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy...a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. ...Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God" (2:10,11b,14, *CEV*).

Advent is about waiting to hear that good news again and experience such peace. But as we wait expectantly for the Savior, there are several ways we can keep busy and prepare ourselves for his arrival. Like the crowds who thronged John the Baptist we may ask, "What should we do?" (Luke 3:10b, *CEV*).

John offered several suggestions as he exhorted the people to turn their hearts to the Lord. We might start by genuinely caring about those around us. Is there anyone who is hungry? Lonely? Anyone who needs clothing or shelter or a sympathetic ear? We can do our best to take care of their needs. We can also take an introspective look at ourselves. Do we cheat, take bribes, or stranglehold those who are weak? Do we treat others unfairly because of their race or their ethnicity or their religious beliefs? If we do, we must repent and ask God's forgiveness of our sins.

We cannot clean up our lives by ourselves. Nor can we be truly happy until we make the necessary preparations. We need God's help. "God planned for us to do good things and

to live as he has always wanted us to live. That's why he sent Christ to make us what we are" (Ephesians 2:10, *CEV*).

The urgency in John's voice still echoes today. He called the people of his day to repentance. Today, that call is even more earnest. We are called to a season of national repentance to prepare ourselves for the *parousia*, the Second Coming of our Lord.

Let us celebrate and be glad because "the Lord will soon be here" (Philippians 4:5). Even so, Lord Jesus, come! Amen.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Dorette Saunders, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Senior Editor in the Education Unit of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: **Burundi** – With thanks to God for peaceful elections last year, and with prayers for lasting peace, that the churches will develop a biblical response to HIV/AIDS, for the publication of the revised Kirundi Bible, for the Roman Catholic Church's translation of the Bible into Kirundi courant, and for the launch of the *Faith Comes By Hearing* program; **Uganda** – With thanks to God for the funds raised for the HIV/AIDS project, *Take Charge*, and with prayers for the successful completion of the Kumam New Testament, the Ngakarimojong Old Testament and the Runyoro:Rutooro and Runyankore:Rukiga Bibles; **Rwanda** – With thanks to God for the launch of the Kinyarwanda Common Language Bible and the Kinyarwanda *Faith Comes By Hearing* program, and with prayers for work on a Children's Bible, efforts to establish closer links with churches and Christian organizations, that God grant healing and reconciliation to the people, and that Bible-based materials will encourage the behavioral changes necessary to protect them from HIV/AIDS.

Activity Corner: "Celebration Instruments"

Supplies needed: Bible; construction paper; glue; tape; scissors; glitter; marker; empty soup or vegetable can with label and lid removed; aluminum foil; 2 rubber bands; 5-6 marbles, uncooked beans, small stones, or pennies.

Cut construction paper to fit around the can with a small overlap. Write "Celebrate!" on the top edge of the paper with the marker. Rub glue on the paper (on the side with the writing) and add glitter. Let dry. Put glue on the other side of paper and affix to can. Tape the overlap. Put marbles, beans, stones, or pennies in the can. Cover the open end with aluminum foil and secure with rubber bands. Invite members of your household to read Psalm 81:1-3 together. Shake your "celebration instrument" during the reading. Conclude by singing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" or one of your favorite Advent carols.