

Lessons for The Third Sunday in Advent

December 11, 2016

Psalm 146 (*antiphon v. 5*) ~ *A song of praise to God expressing the joy of those who trust in the Lord.*

Isaiah 35:1-10 ~ *The joy of God's people in the Kingdom is like a desert celebrating rain.*

James 5:7-11 ~ *As a farmer waits patiently for harvest, we await the fulfillment of the Kingdom.*

Matthew 11:2-15 ~ *Jesus pointed to Kingdom signs fulfilled, as He encouraged John's disciples.*

GATHERING THE TEXTS: God's Gift of Joy to the World

Joy is the mark of the Kingdom of Heaven. Isaiah expressed it in terms of a desert blooming exuberantly after a spring shower. James described the patient waiting of a farmer who needs the autumn and spring rains to harvest a crop. When John's disciples asked about Jesus' identity, they were referred to the witness of Jesus' deeds -- and the joy of those who received His care in their suffering. The message of joy to the world that the shepherds heard is fulfilled in Jesus.

A PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE: Lord, stir up my heart by Your presence in my life so that I may rejoice in the birth of Christ my Savior. Keep me ready to welcome Him at all times; help me live joyfully in the expectation of His coming again. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT: Just as a desert celebrates new rain with the bursting of fresh life, so God rejoices in the fruit produced by the power of His Spirit in the lives of those who welcome the kingdom with joy and respond to the poor, the lame, the blind, and the dispossessed with Christ's compassion.

OFFERING PRAYER: Lord, joyfully we celebrate the kingdom of Your grace;
And patiently we wait to see the glory of Your face.
Now put our hands to service in whatever ways You choose,
And use these gifts to help proclaim Your gracious kingdom news. Amen.

CONVICTION AND COMFORT: We miss the signs of God's Kingdom when we look for power, glory, and political influence. We lose the joy of the Kingdom when we are impatient for its fulfillment. We are either offended or delighted by Christ's work among the blind, the lame, the poor, and the deaf. If we see ourselves as the ones who need Christ's redeeming power, we will be joyfully refreshed like a desert by new rain.