



# DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent (C) – Philippians 4:4-7

**Focus:** *Rejoice! The Lord is near!*

### word of life

**“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.”** Philippians 4:4-5 (NRSV)

Read Philippians 4:4-7

The Third Sunday in Advent has traditionally been known as *Gaudete* Sunday. This Latin word is the first and last word of the opening verse of today’s reading: *Gaudete in Domino semper; iterum dico, gaudete* (“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.” Philippians 4:4 NRSV) This verse was traditionally sung on this Sunday in the liturgical year as the entrance hymn to begin worship. Many churches using Advent wreaths in this season will light a pink or rose-colored candle on this *Gaudete/Rejoice!* Sunday, and the penitential theme of the coming of the Day of the Lord, so prominent in the first two Sundays in Advent, is supplanted with the theme of joy.

1. *Think of your church. In what ways do you celebrate Advent?*
2. *Do you notice a difference in the theme for this Sunday?*

Why this exhortation to rejoice? After all, Paul is writing this letter from a prison cell. (See Philippians 1:7.) He has experienced suffering, and the believers in Philippi have experienced their share of suffering as well. The cause for rejoicing is found in four simple, short words: “The Lord is near.” (Philippians 4:5 NRSV)

3. *Is it possible to find joy in the midst of suffering? Why or why not?*
4. *What does it mean to you to say, “The Lord is near”?*
5. *Have you experienced the nearness of God? How so?*

For Paul, knowing that the Lord is near has profound implications for how the believer is to live. He articulates them in imperatives:

- rejoice (vs. 4)
- let your gentleness be made known to everyone (vs. 5)
- do not worry about anything (vs. 6)
- pray with thanksgiving, letting your needs be made known to God (vs. 6b)

All this is possible because of the belief and conviction that the Lord is near.

6. *Reflect on these four imperatives. Which do you find easier to do?*
7. *Which ones are more challenging for you?*

Paul concludes this rich section of his letter with a benediction of *shalom* – of peace. (vs. 7) It is a wholeness, a deep and abiding completeness beyond all human understanding, a sure and certain hope of the presence and grace of God in our midst. Note the assurance and firm conviction in his words: “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7 NRSV) It doesn’t make sense to our human comprehension. (Does the cross ever make sense?) God’s peace will come, even in the midst of suffering. And so we rejoice this Advent season, for the Lord is near. Thanks be to God!

8. *What does “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” mean to you?*

## **word among us**

This Bible study is being written in the fall of 2012. There has been much speculation recently about a recently-discovered ancient Mayan calendar which ends on December 21, 2012. (If you are reading this after the “end date,” you know what has happened. If you are reading this before December 21, 2012, you better get prepared!) Attempts to discern the timing of the end of the world have come and gone, and we are still waiting.

1. *Can you think of other instances where the end of the world was predicted?*
2. *How did you respond? What did Jesus say about this?*

The season of Advent reminds us that the Lord is near. We hear this proclamation in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. This nearness is three-fold: we anticipate the coming celebration of Emmanuel—God -with-us—in the birth of Jesus; we look for signs of God’s nearness now; and we wait expectantly for the coming of Christ in glory at the last day.

But as Christians, we do not idly wait. No, we rejoice with thanksgiving for the presence of God long ago; we live expectantly for the fulfillment of the promises of God in the future; and we look for the presence of God in our midst now. We may not know what the future holds; but we know Who holds the future. So we can rejoice! The Lord is near.

3. *What evidence of the nearness of God do you currently see in your life?*

Knowing how the story ends, and trusting in the promises of God, we do not need to worry. We experience the peace of God which is beyond anything we can imagine or conceive. This peace “...will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7 NRSV)

## **faith practice in daily life**

### **Hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper**

*Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.* We make this bold proclamation as the cup is lifted up, the bread is broken, and the great thanksgiving is celebrated. In many ways, we are doing as Paul exhorted us. We are rejoicing, for the Lord is near. Christ’s presence in the meal empowers us to lives of service; and it gives us the assurance that we are not alone.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice ... for the Lord is near! Have a joyful *Gaudete* Sunday. May you know and experience the fullness of God’s peace.

4. *What might you do when worries creep into your thinking?*
5. *As best as you can, describe God’s peace.*

### **Prayer**

Ever-present God, we know you are always near us, yet we too often fail to see your presence. Open our eyes and our hearts this Advent season, that we might see you with us. Grant us your peace in Christ our Lord. Amen

## **last word**

Rejoice in the Lord always this week;  
again I say, Rejoice!