

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (12/13-14/2008)

Isaiah 61/1-11, Luke 1/46-54, 1 Thessalonians 5/16-24, John 1/6-8, 19-28

I often feel inadequate when I sit down to pen these reflections on the Scriptural readings.

It is not because the readings are lacking in meaning and application to our lives.

Quite the opposite.

They are most often so rich that a few halting words of mine do them no justice at all.

And, on some weekend liturgies, all of the readings – and the response – are especially rich, and deserve in-depth treatment individually.

I feel that way about this Sunday's selection of uplifting scriptural readings

The first reading from *Isaiah* gives us a preview of coming attractions, if you will.

We Christians read this venerable text written five centuries before Jesus and we apply the word to Christ himself.

The response to the reading is not the usual psalm, but the Canticle of Mary from *Luke's* Gospel, a hymn that reflects God's glory and Mary's humble acceptance of God's will.

The second reading calls for all of us to sing out our joy at God's love of His people in Jesus.

The Gospel reading highlights the role of John the Baptist in preparing all of us for the advent of Jesus himself.

You see what I mean? How do we start to speak or write about these extraordinary events?

Our faith origins go way back, back to that specially chosen people, the Jews, whom God called to be the first bearers of His message of love for all people.

As the Church teaches, the Hebrew people are our spiritual ancestors; and let us not forget that.

The proper response to the message in *Isaiah* is "*to rejoice heartily in the Lord.*"

There is a lot of forced joviality and holiday cheer spread about during these pre-Christmas days.

This year, with the financial and international situation so chaotic, it's easy to understand peoples' reluctance to let go and rejoice in the Lord.

But the message is centuries' old, and it has accompanied and carried God's people through thick and thin, through disaster and exaltation, through suffering and elation.

After warning us of the unpredictable second coming of the Lord, St. Paul takes up *Isaiah's* cheerful tone and advises the people of Thessalonica to rejoice always.

"Do not quench the Spirit," he advises; *"May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you... be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Rejoice, Christians, and give thanks!

The Gospel selection from *John* begins with the words and actions of John the Baptist.

His sole purpose in life seems to have been to call the people to change of heart and to introduce the *"one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me..."*

So, here we are, at the tail end of these prophecies, wondering whether they will have any bearing upon our lives.

Should we rejoice? Should we be ready? Should we be grateful?

There are less than two weeks left until Christmas, plenty of time to compose ourselves, to take these questions seriously, to look for the answer in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.