

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” The Apostle Paul gives us words to reflect upon this third Sunday in Advent. Rejoice!

And what a wonderful abundance of reasons we have to rejoice this day. How joyful it is to see our congregation full of children and their families. How joyful it is to hear the Christmas story from some of the youngest at our church. It’s easy for us to rejoice, especially when the story itself is an account of joy.

I love how our Christmas program incorporated Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep. We read in Matthew chapter 18, **“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.”** How humbling it is to hear that the shepherd leaves his ninety-nine sheep to find the one that went astray. How encouraging it is to hear the joy when the man finds the sheep.

As we reflect this Advent on all that Christ has done for us, we realize that we were that lost sheep. Humanity had lost its way, and God needed to send a man to rescue us who were out to pasture. He sent Jesus Christ, true God, born of a virgin to grow up to be a man who would rescue us from sin, death, and the devil.

This is the message that the angel told the shepherds. **“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”** The shepherds leave the manger glorifying and praising God.

The Magi whose arrival we celebrate on Epiphany, arrived much later, perhaps when Jesus was two years old. But at the sight of the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. The shepherds and the magi rejoiced at the birth of Christ. Indeed, to quote Paul, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”**

In this Advent season, we wait for Christmas with joy. We have joy because we recognize that we are the sheep that Jesus took home gently on His shoulders. We have joy because even as we wait for December 25th, we know Christ comes to us through His Word read, through the Sacrament of Holy Communion received, and He always promises to hear our prayers.

Sometimes, life can be hard. We can feel glum despite this good news. Nonetheless, trust Christ even when He seems not be listening. Reach out to Him in prayer. He is near at hand to save, even when all signs indicate the opposite. This Advent you wait with joy because the Father sent His Son Jesus to rescue you, and He walks alongside you in good times and bad.