# Rejoice and Exult

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*14 Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. 16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. 17 The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing 18 as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. 19 I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. 20 At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD*. (Zephaniah 3:14-20)

## 1. Blue Christmas

Advent and Christmas are the most joyful season for many people. Advent and Christmas can also be difficult, especially when we remember those who may not be with us anymore.

The singer, Elvis Presley once sang a song called “Blue Christmas.” In the song, the lyrics say, “I’ll have a blue Christmas without you. I’ll be so blue just thinking about you. Decorations of red on a green Christmas tree. Won’t be the same dear, if you’re not here with me.”

## 2. Rejoice and Exult

When we look at the situation of Judah as described in Zephaniah, we can see that the situation is much like a Blue Christmas. The prophet Zephaniah served the people of Judah in the seventh century B.C. He was the fourth-generation descendant of Hezekiah, a notable king of Judah from 715 to 686 B.C. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 B.C.) and announced to Judah, Jerusalem, and the nations approaching God’s judgment.

God’s judgment was inevitable, unavoidable, and imminent. God was disgusted by the idolatry, false worship, and lack of trust in God. However, in chapter three, Zephaniah proclaims comfort and consolation to those who wait patiently for the Lord and “serve him with one accord” (3:9).

Zephaniah 3:14 says, “***Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem****!”* At the time, people in Judah is far from singing, shouting, rejoicing and exulting. Zephaniah

1:14 & 15 goes into the details of the situation, ***"The great day of the LORD is near… 15 That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness… I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the LORD."***

The people in Judah faced grief, abuse, persecution, and hopelessness. The people were soon to be judged and doomed. They could sense the oppression and despair in their situation. In chapter three, Zephaniah proclaims the words of hope and that God will rescue his people. That's why Zephaniah says in 3:14, "Sing aloud, shout, rejoice and exult with all your heart."

**3. What Makes Them Rejoice?**

Verse 15 tells us what God is planning to do. "***The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more****."* The people had ever reason to fear but the Lord clarifies that Israel's redeemer, the Messiah king, will be in their midst. The long-promised deliverer will come, taking away the oppression of their enemies and forgiving their sin.

Verse 17 in the passage says, "***he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing****."* The Lord will deliver his people and will delight in them. The nation would be part of God's great love once again.

Have you ever imagined what it might look like to have God rejoice over you and sing to you with loud singing? You can almost imagine the picture of God singing and dancing because of you. The verse tells us that God loves His people and reminds us that the Lord will do anything to care for his children.

I am reminded of this feeling when I see my family after a long time. This past Thanksgiving, Christine and I had a quiet Thanksgiving. This Christmas, our children are coming to visit us for the holidays. This will be the first time since 2010 that our children will all be at home for the holidays. The experience of being with family and loved ones helps us to understand how God feels for us. Zephaniah 3:15 tells us that the Lord is in our midst.

**4. Emmanuel**

In Matthew 1:20 and the following, the angel Gabriel appears to Joseph, Mary's fiancé, and says "***do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus..." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel which means "God is with us***." Gabriel tells Joseph that Jesus is born to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus is God in the flesh, and God literally among us.

This story tells us of how God rejoices at the birth of Jesus. Jesus is the evidence of God's love for us. Among all the gifts we can receive in life, Jesus is the best gift that God can give to us. God sent his Holy Spirit to stay with us and guide us as we await the return of Jesus back to the earth. The Holy Spirit remains with us as God being ever present in our lives.

**5. Rejoice Always**

The theme for this Sunday, the third week of Advent, is joy. We all want to experience joy in life. We all know however that not every moment in life is joyeful. Despite this, Paul in Philippians 4:4-6 says, "***Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.*** ***5*** ***Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.*** ***6*** ***Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.***"

The apostle Paul wrote this letter when he was in prison. He exhorted the Philippians to rejoice always. We see that the outward circumstances didn't dictate the resolve of Paul, even when he was imprisoned. Paul knew that no matter what might happen to him, God would always be the one to love him and care for him. We all can become discouraged when issues or difficult circumstances come up in life. But we are reminded that regardless of the situation, nothing can separate us from the ultimate joy that we have in Christ.

**6. Conclusion**

When we think of God, many believe the God of the Old Testament to be an angry, sexist, racist, unjust, vindictive, harsh, unforgiving and judgmental executioner. However, who is God in Zephaniah 3:17? "***The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing***." Some say that Zephaniah 3:17 is John 3:16 in the Old Testament. This passage tells us how much God loves us.

Zephaniah exhorts his people to sing and rejoice because the Lord loves them so that he would soon be in their midst. Zephaniah's prophecy is fulfilled by the birth of Jesus.

**7. Application**

Does this season make you feel sad, lonely, and forsaken? Zephaniah 3:14 and the following asks us to rejoice inspite of our situations because God loves us in all circumstances. The Advent and Christmas holiday are a reminder that God is ever present in our lives. We celebrate the birth of Jesus as we remember that God is constantly with us. May God remind you and me every day of his presence and his love for us. Amen.