

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20

¹⁴Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!

¹⁵The 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.

¹⁶On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.

¹⁷The 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
¹⁸as on a day of festival.

I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

¹⁹I 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.

²⁰At 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.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel: Luke 3:7-18

⁷John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

⁸Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” ¹¹In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” ¹²Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”

¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayers of Intercession

As we await the coming of Christ, we pray in hope for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

For choirs, hymn writers, musicians, and off-key singing, we give you thanks, Holy One. Fill us with your song of joy. Open us to proclaim your glory in our singing, speaking, and silence. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Shepherd of all, clothe your church with righteousness through Jesus Christ. Grant wisdom and insight to our Bishops Elizabeth and John and for our Conference Dean Jonathan. Search out all who are lost and bring them to eternal life, Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For the hurting places in creation; for seas and lands ravaged by natural disasters; for communities and creatures displaced by floods and droughts. Grant peace through your presence and joy in your healing. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For peace to ring out in our hearts and in our homes; for mercy and forgiveness to reign in every community; for war to cease and hunger to end. Give us this joy now, Holy One. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For those who are oppressed; for soldiers and veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and their families; for neighbors who have no access to medical care; for those who are ill and those who mourn *Ellen, Jim, Marilyn, Shannon, Ann, Gary, Tucker, Philip, Fred, Susan, and Ken*. Fill them with your peace. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

For foster families opening their homes; for grandparents raising grandchildren; for single parents struggling to make ends meet; for expectant parents who now grieve. Give strength and comfort, Holy One. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

We lift up to you those serving in the military of our country – here at home and throughout the world; watch over them, keep them safe, and return them home quickly; we pray especially for *Jennifer, Carson, Rick, Justin, Nicholas, Kelly, Paul, and Zachary*, Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

In thanksgiving for preachers and teachers who have guided us on the way. Bring us with them to rejoice eternally in you. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Confident that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we bring to you these prayers and those unspoken, in the name of Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.