

Growth Group Questions

Third Sunday of Advent, December 17, 2023

Introduction

Each Sunday of the Church Year has a Latin name, most of which I can't remember or care that much about. This Sunday though, is "Gaudete" Sunday, which means "Joy." How does that theme fit with this week's readings, and how do we show it in our Advent wreath tradition?

Into the Word – Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11

1. Who is the speaker in verses 1-3, saying he has come to proclaim such good news? Look up Isaiah 11:2 and 49:8,9. But especially look at Luke 4:21 for the clincher.
2. The Anointed One would proclaim two "time" things. The "year of the Lord's favor" and the "day of vengeance." The day of vengeance of course refers to Judgment Day, but what do you know about the year of the Lord's favor? Look at Leviticus 25:8-55 to learn about the Old Testament "Year of Jubilee" and the good news it brought. How is Jesus' message even better?
3. Who is the speaker in verses 10-11, rejoicing in the LORD who has robed him in righteousness and salvation? (Note the source of Revelation's pictures of saints in white robes.)
4. How is the message of God saving us by covering us with Christ's righteousness a more comforting truth than the Methodist church's message that God empowers us to become more and more holy to please him? What is the inevitable result of that false doctrine?

Into the Word – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

5. Verses 16-18 seem completely unrealistic. How can Christians be joyful *always* and thankful in *every* circumstance?

6. The NIV2011 translation is better than the NIV84 we used for so long. What do each of these phrases mean?
 - Do not quench the Spirit. (Put out the Spirit's fire.)
 - Do not treat prophecies with contempt.
 - Test them all; hold on to what is good.
 - Reject every kind of evil.
7. How do the verses above show us the importance of practicing not only the positive side of fellowship (we're one in Church) but also the negative side (we're one in Church, but not united in teaching)? What always happens when truth compromises with error?

Into the Word – John 1:6-8, 19-28

8. Why might it have been a temptation for John the Baptist to fail to confess the truth when the priests and Levites came from the Jews?
9. Bethany was about 20 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Why would people have made that kind of trip to see John?
10. It's always seemed strange that the Christian Church decided to have this week's Gospel lesson follow last week's (Mark 1:1-8) when there's so much overlap. What is the slightly different focus in John's gospel as compared to Mark's?
11. As we see John confess freely to the light, we remember our own calling to be salt and light. In surveys every year nearly two-thirds of unbelievers say they would come to Christmas worship if they were invited by a friend. You have a week until Christmas – find someone and invite them to see Jesus with you this year. Share and pray.

Closing Prayer

Christ our King, bless us as we wait for you, trusting in your light and love always. Make me your witness and lead me to joy. Amen.