**Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 (ESV)**

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; **2**  to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; **3** to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. **4**  They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.**8**  For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. **9** Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed. **10**  I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. **11** For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations.

**“Rejoice In God’s Redeeming Spirit”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Many are looking for some deeper meaning during the holiday season. It goes double for those not having things go well be it with a job, family, or whatever. Businesses try to monopolize on this awareness felt by people. So it is not surprising a recent book is for sale in December entitled, “Man Seeks God: My Flirtations With The Divine.” The writer goes on a quest to answer what a nurse asked him at the hospital, “Have you found your god yet?” In the end, what he found was an "IKEA God." "Some assembly required," he says. "[The] idea is that you can cobble together your sort of own personal religion, a sort of mixed tape of God." In his case, that foundation was Judaism and Kabbalah. "But on top of that foundation, you can add all kinds of things," he says. "So I'm sort of in a perpetual seeker mode, but I think that's OK."[[1]](#footnote-1)

As the church continues in the season of Advent, the question is never, “Have you found your god yet?” Such words only drive sinners deeper into their sad condition. The Psalmist David declared, “God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one” (53:2-3). Advent has a repentant theme because man is helpless to find God. By our own strength, we only end up creating something in our sinful image. Yet, the third candle today on the Advent wreath stands out as pink. It proclaims good news in the midst of all the blue. This third Sunday is all about joy outside of whatever humanity could hope for by our hands. Out of Advent God comes with the answer: REJOICE!

Of all the Old Testament prophets, no one receives more attention in the New Testament than Isaiah. His words display a detailed revelation of who the Savior would be and what this Savior would do. Unfortunately, the nation of Israel did not see it this way when Isaiah preached in his time. Only centuries later, after the nation completely collapsed to the Babylonians, did a remnant turn back to hear this promise of a Savior. Rather than searching out God by their own devices. God put them into a position for His Word to search them out. They had to look at the Messiah in a way that was apart from their works. He would have authority to save only sinners. At the coming of Christ, Jesus used this text from Isaiah. No one else could joyfully declare, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor…” (Luke 4:18-19).

Rejoice for the Spirit of God seeks us out in Jesus. Sinful man is not to be in a position of acting, but receiving what God gives for salvation. The environment where the promised Messiah goes to work is upon those in need. Are you in need of repentance? Jesus says, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Luke 5:31). If we are picking things apart like a scientist or sitting in the driver’s seat of “my life” like a Pharisee, then there is no need of Jesus as Savior for me the sinner. Even John the baptizer steps out of the way because salvation is only by faith in One Man. Those wanting answers only heard him say, “I am not the Christ.” The Spirit of God worked through prophets and apostles, but Jesus makes full claim to the Spirit. He alone shares this glory with the Father as the Son. God revealed as the Holy Trinity has put Himself fully into seeking after man. It is to save us from the damage already done by sin, death, and devil. Christ comes not for His sake but to save you.

The outcome of Israel’s deliverance by a Savior would reverse their sorrows. “They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.” What God would do by His Servant promised change for Israel. All that was lost to their sinful ways would have a new way of life. All those words like, “build up, raise up, and repair” were joyful sounds to hear. They were words of healing for a people that God had broken by Babylon. So noticeable would this restoration be that other nations could not deny God’s love for them. The promised Savior had the Spirit to take what was dead and make it alive. Jesus as the Word made flesh brought a new kind of kingdom for Israel. It was an everlasting covenant carved into His flesh. A judgment received on the cross, but justice rewarded by His resurrection from the dead. The victory of the Messiah would be their victory. To believe in His saving work was how the Spirit produced offspring of a nation that would not pass away.

Rejoice for the Spirit of God sanctifies us by His Word. There is plenty of talk of restoring, upgrading, and changing things in our society. Comforting sounds to hear when so much is going wrong with what we see. It is the same old story for a sinful world spiraling out of control. However, what we have from God’s Word is the Spirit at work changing us by what we already have in Jesus Christ. The Psalmist said, “Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.” What comes through the Church is what the Father gives of His Son. It rests upon the good Spirit that is unafraid to be with us in the darkness because Jesus has gone to the cross. Luther says,

“It is as if God were saying: “There is nothing to do about it, when they stand in My Word and righteousness, their word will remain, and they shall be increased and distinguished from other nations by the Word and sacraments, because they are known by the nations, because they are the descendants, because Word, Spirit, and sacraments continue in the church, because the church has the promise of continued duration.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Baptism reverses what sin, death, and devil destroy. Things are different. The redeeming work of Christ daily restores our lives by His holiness. As Isaiah said, “all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed.” This is not a blessing by worldly standards, but that we are the children of God in Christ Jesus.

Where God seeks and sanctifies us, we can rejoice that His Spirit shields us with joy. In Israel’s depressing state, they were to look upon the strength of the Savior. Isaiah proclaimed, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.” Of course, at the coming of Christ few paid attention to God’s Son in a manger. Even less were happy to look upon Jesus as the crucified Savior. The same can apply today. How can people find joy when the Law drives us to do more, when the holiday season is lonely, when life has no answers? The writer’s quest for God lead him to determine what he had was “okay” for him. Okay does not protect us against despair or take away sin. Only the Spirit of God shields us with joy promised by the Gospel. St. Paul said, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” He is not talking about always having the emotion of joy. Such things cannot always be with sinners in a sinful world. Yet, what can be is the Spirit of joy that sets before us the victory of Jesus. He hold the heart of rejoicing by His redeeming love. It extends all the way to the last day for the living and the dead. Out of Advent God comes with the answer: REJOICE! Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.

1. http://www.npr.org/2011/12/05/143057528/man-seeks-god-finds-wayne-of-staten-island [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luther, M. (1999, c1972). *Vol. 17*: *Luther's works, vol. 17 : Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Is 61:9). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)