

Third Sunday of Advent

December 17, 2006

Zephaniah 3:14-18a; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

Homilist: S. Benilda Desmond, O.P.

In this winter of 2006 when our world seems unusually burdened with violence, oppression, disease and hunger the cry of the prophet Zephaniah echoes across the ages telling us to, "fear not, be not discouraged ... your God will rejoice over you ... and renew you in his love." If ever a people longed for light in the darkness and comfort in a time of suffering, it is during this cold winter of our discontent.

St. Paul writing to his beloved Philippians, as they endured the pressure of persecution, urges them "to rejoice for the Lord is near." Two thousand years later we hear these words in the midst of a disastrous war in Iraq and a threatening genocide in Darfur and we cry out with all our hearts; "Come Lord Jesus."

It is John the Baptist who stands at the threshold of a new age urging us to prepare the way of the Lord. When the crowds asked him what they were to do he insisted on their living according to justice and urged them to share their food and clothing with the needy. It is the same good news that Jesus came to preach.

Like the Christians of that first age of the Church we admit that we live in desperate times, but we live in hope. Just as the shepherds and the wise men found their way to the manger in Bethlehem we will be lead to the Prince of Peace. Our determination to live in hope will be nourished by the Holy Spirit of Jesus that dwells within us. That Spirit of Christ that enabled the disciples of Jesus to move through the trauma of his death to the joy of seeing the Risen Lord, so too will that Spirit bring us the faith, wisdom and courage to move through these difficult times. Always we place our trust in "the God who so loved the world that he sent his only Son to be our Savior."