

The image features three lit red candles in the foreground, their flames glowing against a dark background. The background is filled with numerous out-of-focus, circular bokeh lights in shades of brown and gold, creating a warm and atmospheric setting. The text is centered over the candles.

A Different Kind of Advent:

RENEWAL & RESTORATION: ADVENT III

Third Sunday of Advent: Gaudete Sunday

We light the third candle today to symbolize the joy of the gospel as we are called to be heralds of the good news of God's love that comes to us in the incarnation of Jesus.

SEE+ Traditionally referred to as “Gaudete Sunday,” the Third Sunday of Advent celebrates the joy of the incarnation of God’s love in Jesus. We may wonder why this third week of Advent focuses on rejoicing. We will get to that in this reflection shortly.

We begin this week’s reflection once again with the figure of John the Baptist. The gospel for the Third Sunday of Advent portrays him as a **herald**, someone who announces or proclaims good news. The gospel is very clear that John’s primary focus as herald is to “testify to the light.” John the Baptist is not the light but the one who testifies to the light which is dawning on the world. In Advent, we await the fresh outpouring of that light.

To get an insight into what John the Baptist as herald is testifying to, we need to look at the first reading for the Third Sunday of Advent from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is speaking to his people who have been broken by exile and announces a message of good news that portrays God as a nurse reaching out to heal the brokenhearted and to set them free:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me and has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord.” [With this exact quotation from the prophet Isaiah the gospel of Luke characterizes Jesus’ mission and ministry. (Lk. 4:14ff)]

We begin to see how Isaiah's words herald the good news of the one coming to heal and bring peace, freedom, and favor and how this leads to joy and hope for his brokenhearted brothers and sisters. Their return from exile became the fulfillment of God’s word, which they expressed in this event's joyful commemoration.

As we wait for the commemoration of the incarnation, for the dawning of the light to which John testifies, we are challenged in two ways. One way indeed is to place our hope in God's continuing to bend toward us and our world in compassionate love, like a nurse that provides healing and mercy. Like Isaiah, we know that God continues to bind up our wounds and to heal our brokenness. This hope inspires joy in a world that desperately cries out for that healing and mercy.

The second challenge presented to us is to be ***heralds of this good news***, like Isaiah and John the Baptist, pointing the way to this hope by becoming what it proclaims. This week we reflect on what it means to be a herald to our world. The Advent season provides some suggestions. The herald of the gospel today is challenged

- to listen, be awake and alert to the movements of the Spirit in ourselves and others, as well as in God's word;
- to discern and hear the real cries of those in need and to attend to them;

- to accompany those that are brokenhearted and stand in solidarity with those suffering and afraid;
- to witness to the light which is Christ in the darkest corners of our world.

The joy that accompanies this restorative ministry comes from the privilege of walking with others as they discover and deepen their understanding of God's love and mercy active in our world and the healing and mercy that it unleashes. We experience the pull of compassion not only in God's mercy in our own lives but also in its presence in the lives of those we serve. When we experience this, we experience the joy that God is present and active in our world.

DISCERN+ (We reflect on the readings for this Third Sunday of Advent and the testifying of others involved in restorative justice ministry as a way to listen to their challenge and discern ways they impact our lives and ministries. What are the ways the Scriptures and others' experiences, words, and stories help us understand what God is inviting us to do as heralds of the good news?]

Readings for the Third Sunday of Advent:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/121320.cfm>

First Reading: Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11: *"As the earth brings forth its plants, and a garden makes its growth spring up, so will the Lord God make justice and praise spring up before all the nations."*

Second Reading: 1 Thess 5: 16-24: *"Rejoice always."*

Gospel: John 1:6-8; 19-28: *"He came for testimony, to testify to the light."*

Wisdom Voices of Chaplaincy: Restorative Justice

The *Wisdom Voices of Chaplaincy* video below illustrates concrete ways to be restoration and healing in an accompanying ministry. These two stories testify to the joy

that erupts when heralds of the good news witness individuals becoming aware of God's love and presence in their lives.



https://youtu.be/215j_C65sG8

ACT + (Questions for reflection in light of the scriptures and other voices.)

1. What are ways that others have communicated the joy of the gospel to you?
2. What are moments and experiences when you have witnessed joy while ministering to others?

3. How can you join others and "testify to the light" of Christ dawning in our world?
4. Who are the brokenhearted and afraid in our world today and how is Christ calling us to reach out and accompany and heal them?
5. What do I need to do to become a herald of the joy of the gospel?