

Joy

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT



Do not be afraid to share with others the hope and joy of the risen Christ! Nurture the spark that has been kindled in you, but at the same time share it. You will come to realize that it grows by being given away!

Pope Francis, *XXXVIII World Youth Day* 26 November 2023



Pause and pray

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Light a candle

As we light this third candle on our Advent wreath, may we be filled with your overflowing joy. Amen.

Hear Scripture

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the scripture readings and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what they are saying to them.

Zephaniah 3:14-18

A reading from the prophet Zephaniah:

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter Jerusalem!
The 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.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
Do not fear, O Zion;
do not let your hands grow weak.



The 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
as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

Philippians 4:4-7

A reading from the Philippians:

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

Luke 3:10-18

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

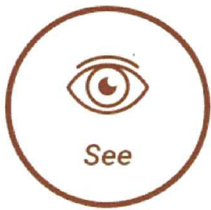
When all the people asked John, 'What must we do?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!'

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.



Roland's story

Roland, a father of four, participated in the Youth Capacity Strengthening Program, enabling him to develop a stable income to support his family.
Photo: Arlette Bashizi/Caritas Australia



A 26-year-old father of four, Roland and his family were forced to flee their hometown in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to violent ethnic conflict. When his family arrived in their new village, they had nothing. Struggling to provide a single meal for his family each day, Roland had to take on menial tasks like digging latrines to survive.

Roland was selected to participate in the Youth Capacity Strengthening program, funded by Caritas Australia in partnership with Caritas Développement Kongolo. Roland chose carpentry as his trade, which empowered him to develop a stable income so he could support his family and build self-reliance.

Before joining the program, Roland's family lived in extreme poverty. He had no steady income or secure access to land. However, the vocational training he received in carpentry transformed his situation dramatically.

"This training is crucial for us because it reduces unemployment, helps us escape poverty, and gives us freedom," Roland explained.

Within months, Roland mastered carpentry, which allowed him to earn a stable income by making and selling furniture such as chairs and school benches. This income enabled him to provide for his family's basic needs, including food, healthcare, and education for his children. His wife also began selling produce at the local market, adding to the household income.

"Since I started working after my training with Caritas, my life has changed. At home, we live in peace; we have enough food when we need it; my children go to school," Roland explained.

Beyond this, Roland has become a role model in his community. He mentors 15 young people in carpentry, helping them acquire skills that can keep them out of dangerous work in the local mining sector. While mentoring other community members, he is working to expand his workshop, increase his land for farming, and purchase extra equipment.



This week's readings come together in surprising ways. The first two are bursting with happiness. The prophet Zephaniah says the Lord is in our midst and 'he will dance with shouts of joy for you' as much as he will 'renew you by his love.' St Paul's letter to the Philippians says repeatedly that he wants the community to be happy and not to worry too much. We must be tolerant. We must be open to the peace of God 'which surpasses all understanding'.

How can we put all this exuberance alongside the figure of John the Baptist who is central in today's Gospel? He seems austere, telling people to give away their extra clothes. He says that Jesus is coming to burn the chaff 'in a fire that will never go out.' He is a real firebrand!

The answer is that John is speaking to people who have lost the ability to be truly happy. We also come across people like this, people for whom the things that preoccupy them fill up their entire field of vision. They can't see beyond the demands of the here and now. John calls people to downsize their egos and to keep their ambitions within reason. No more bullying or power games. We are called to live justly. This means seeing the whole picture. True happiness is never blind or blinkered.

Think about Roland whose story we can encounter thanks to Caritas Australia. He lives in one of the most dangerous and violent countries, Democratic Republic of the Congo. He says that the work you are supporting makes him happy. His **joy** is deep, not passing. That is because he is learning skills to improve the wellbeing of his whole family and to dream of a sustainable future.



- By learning and mentoring others, Roland has given joy to his family and community. Share his joy-filled story with your family as you share a meal.
- Think of ways you could share joy with your community. For example, join a group that sings Christmas carols, spend some time with a family member you don't often see, visit a nursing home or create a Christmas hamper for a family in the community.
- Consider sharing the joy of Caritas Australia's work through a [Global Gift](#).



Joyful God,

Breathe in us your joy. Open our eyes to wonder, our ears to laughter and our hearts to love.

May those who lovingly mentor others, like Roland, feel the joy of your gaze.

Make us joyful witnesses in our homes, in our school and in our world.

Amen.