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On this Rose, or Gaudete Sunday, we focus on the third theme of Advent, Joy. According to the old themes of Advent the theme for today is Heaven. Joy and heaven are two themes which are closely related. In fact, C. S. Lewis writes in his letters to Malcolm, *Joy is the serious business of heaven*. Heaven is so serious about joy that it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Lewis reminds Malcolm that Joy is a very different thing from momentary and fleeting happiness. Yet happiness is often confused with joy because we know happiness better. Lewis writes that we may get a foretaste of joy through that which makes us happy, but real joy is not found in pleasures that do not last. Happiness is only temporary, it comes to us through things that do not last -activities, pleasures, even that which is not good for us, like falling into sin. We see this in children at Christmas who are so excited and pleased with presents, but who after a while lose interest in them, and eventually lay them aside. That is part of being a child, or a child at heart.

One of the hard lessons of growing up is that we will not always be happy; this year has proven that to us in one way or another. This year has proven to us how much we need true joy in our lives. The typical Christmas season alone proves to us how unhappy our material culture is. Our culture thinks that the more Christmas parties and the more expensive Christmas presents we receive, the happier we will be. We know the classic Christmas stories like A Christmas Carol, where the poor family is more joyful than the rich family. We are reminded of this when we fast during Lent, and in a different way it is the goal of Advent, to remove the distractions of this world to better help us cultivate joy. The lives of the saints of God reveal this, that true joy is not materialistic. The truly joyful life is a foretaste of heaven on earth.

St. John the Baptist is one great saint of Advent who we do not always associate with joy. We do not often think of his message, *repent and be baptized, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight*, as a message of joy. But news of the Advent of Jesus Christ is good news indeed, it is news that should fill us with joy! St. John the Baptist must have been possessed of joy to have lived the way he did, out in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey, clothed in rough camel's hair and leather. Who, according to the Kingdom of Heaven, would live in such a way but one who is filled with joy over the promises of God? We are reminded by the very life of St. John the Baptist that just because one lives a life of austerity does not mean that one is joyless. The very manner of St. John the Baptist's life convicted Herod and the Pharisees who loved their worldly goods and comforts. So, the message of St. John the Baptist was a warning to some and joyful news to others. His birth brought joy to the Wisemen and Shepherds, yet it struck fear in the heart of Herod and his court. Likewise, Jesus' earthly ministry inspired fear in the hearts of the Temple priests and

Pharisees. Yet it was all joy to those who were healed, as St. John rejoiced in his prison cell over the Jesus' reassurance.

The prophecies of Isaiah and St. John the Baptist are fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ. His ministry is a ministry of joy; for *the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.* These are physical miracles which we have record of in the Gospels, and they are spiritual miracles which we can experience the effects of ourselves. The spiritually blinded eyes can receive their sight again, those paralyzed by sin can be set free, the lepers of impurity can be cleansed, ears deaf to the Gospel can be opened, and the spiritually dead can be raised. These miracles are experienced today because the poor, the spiritually poor, still have the Gospel preached to them. The Gospel is glad tidings of great joy for all people who come to realize that the road to Heaven, to everlasting joy, is opened to all people through Jesus Christ. These miraculous healings, both physical and spiritual, bring not just happiness but true joy.

This year we hope again that our Christmas will be one of joy, and not just happiness. But are we ready to allow God to do His work in us to receive His Joy? Are we ready to receive Jesus Christ when He comes on Christmas Day and when He comes to judge the living and the dead at the end of the world? Are we ready to receive Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion this morning? Joy is the serious business of heaven, the gift that God wants to give every Christian.