

In this New Testament lesson Paul invites the new disciples at Philippi to exult in the Lord, who is near at hand. In prayer and thanksgiving they need have no anxiety. God's peace, which is beyond human understanding, will keep their hearts and thoughts in Jesus. Even though Paul was experiencing his own troubles and may at this time have been in prison, this letter is often called "the epistle of joy." Hear now these words from Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Luke 3:7-18

In our gospel John the Baptist preaches repentance to all those who hear his call to baptism, and he tells them of the mighty one to come. It is not sufficient to claim to be children of Abraham. All who are to escape judgment must learn to share with others and to be just in their daily work. John himself is not the Christ but the servant of the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and a refining fire. Hear now these words from the Gospel of Luke.

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

"What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

"Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely - be content with your pay."

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

This is the word of the Lord. **May the reading and the hearing of your word inform our minds, comfort our souls and guide our feet.**