



THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. The Third Sunday of Advent

The lection scripture for the third Sunday of Advent (Malachi 3:16-18) reminds us that Advent is a time of spiritual preparation and repentance -- an opportunity to ensure that we are faithful as we await the Messiah.

Traditionally, the pink candle (the Candle of Joy) is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, which is sometimes called "*Gaudete*" Sunday from the Latin Introit for Advent ("*Gaudete in Domino*" or "Rejoice in the Lord Always") which is triggered, historically, by the words of Paul, "Rejoice in the Lord Always."¹ In the Anglican tradition, this Sunday is called "Stir Up" Sunday after the

Prayer for Gathering or Collection which begins, “Stir up thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let thy bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us...” The third Sunday of Advent was thought of as a time of restrained rejoicing because the period of fasting was almost over.

Clergy have struggled for ages with how to keep their congregations focused on spiritual renewal and repentance on this Sunday when all outward indicators, like flashing neon signs, are pointing to the big day of Christmas. The directors of music must resist the congregation’s and the culture’s pressure and pleadings to sing those anticipated Christmas carols. Directors, resist! It is not time, yet.

In the middle of a penitential season, how do we find joy before completing the journey from Advent to Christmas? Could it be that, in the midst of the commercialization of Christmas, lies the key to finding the balance and patience as well as “the seeking” required during Advent?

As a child, I remember singing in the weeks leading up to Christmas, “He’s making a list and checking it twice. He’s gonna find out who’s been naughty or nice.” How nervous I would become, because I was so unsure of how my behavior earlier in the year would be viewed by Santa Claus, the U.S. incarnation of the Greek St. Nicholas of Myra. Could it be that the message of St. Nicholas in the person of Santa Claus is merely echoing the proclamation of Malachi: “The lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the lord and thought on his name?”

II. Music for this Advent Moment

Joy comes in knowing, as in the words of the spiritual “Way over in Beulah lan’, we’re gonna have a good time way over in Beulah Lan’.” But Malachi reminds us that only through our living righteously will the lord put us on the list to “walk the streets of gold.”

Way Over In Beulah Lan’

Way over in Beulah lan’
Beulah lan’, Beulah lan’,
I’ve got a home over in Beulah lan’.
(Repeat)

Well, I’ve got a home in Beulah lan’,
Not goin’ ta stop until I reach that lan’.
Well, I’m not so p’ticular ‘bout how I reach that lan’,
But I’m gonna meet mother in Beulah lan.’

(Chorus)

Way down yonder on Jordan’s shore,
Where we meet we’ll part no more.
Not so p’ticular ‘bout part no more,
Gonna meet my mother on Jordan’s shore

(Chorus [2 times])

Down in Babylon, on that old field,
He saw the *big ole* wheel.
Well, not so p'ticular 'bout that *big ole* wheel,
But I just want to know how the chariot feel.
(Chorus)

Way down yonder on Jordan shore,
Angels say that time will be no mo'.
Well, some come crippled, some come lame,
All come hoppin' in my Jesus' name.

(Chorus)

Well, Jordan's river it's chilly and col',
It chills your body, but not your soul.
Well, I'm not so p'ticular 'bout the body and soul,
I gonna meet my mother in Beulah lan.'

(Chorus)

I've got a home in Beulah lan',
Not goin' ta stop until I reach that lan',
Not so p'ticular 'bout how I reach that lan',
Gonna meet my mother in that Beulah lan.'

(Chorus)

Well, I've got a home in Beulah lan',
Not goin' ta stop until I shake her hand.
Well, I'm not so p'ticular 'bout shakin' her hand,
Lord, gonna meet my mother in Beulah lan'.
(Chorus)²

Writ'en Down My Name

Oh members rise, oh rise, and don't you be ashamed,
O Jesus Christ, the lamb of God done
Writ'en down my name (in the kingdom)
Writ'en down my name (in the kingdom)
Writ'en down my name (in the lamb's book)
Writ'en down my name (in the lamb's book)
Writ'en down my name.

Oh members rise, oh rise, and don't you be ashamed,
O Jesus Christ, the lamb of God done
Writ'en down my name, (on the mountain)
Writ'en down my name, (in the valley)
Writ'en down my name, (on the highway)
Writ'en down my name, (and the byways.)

Writ'en down my name, (hallelujah!)
Writ'en down my name, (hallelujah!)
Writ'en down my name, (hallelujah!)
Writ'en down my name, (hallelujah!)

Writ'en down my name.
Writ'en down my name (in the kingdom)
Writ'en down my name (in the kingdom)
Writ'en down my name (in the lamb's book)
Writ'en down my name (in the lamb's book)
Writ'en down my name, (hallelujah!)
Writ'en down my name, (hallelujah!)
Writ'en down my name, (hallelujah!)
Writ'en down my name, (hallelujah!)
Writ'en down my name.
O Jesus Christ, the lamb of God done
Writ'en down my name.³

Sign Me Up

Sign me up for the Christian Jubilee,
Write my name on heaven's roll.
For I've been changed since the Lord has lifted me,
I want to be ready when Jesus comes.

When Jesus comes, oh, the trumpet will sound loud.
When my savior comes, all the saints in Christ shall rise,
Oh, I'm glad I've been changed since he lifted me,
I want to be ready when Jesus comes.⁴

Certainly, Lord

Leader: Have you got good religion?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Have you got good religion?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Have you got good religion?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lord!

Leader: Have you been redeemed?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Have you been redeemed?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Have you been redeemed?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Certainly, certainly, certainly, lord!

Leader: Have you been to the water?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Have you been to the water?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Have you been to the water?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Certainly, certainly, certainly, lord!

Leader: Have you been baptized?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Have you been baptized?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Have you been baptized?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lord!

Leader: Is your name on high?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Is your name on high?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Leader: Is your name on high?
Congregation: Certainly, Lord!
Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lord!⁵

A Child of the King

Stanza 1

My father is rich in houses and lands,
he holdeth the wealth of the world in his hands!
of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,
his coffers are full, he has riches untold.

Refrain

I'm a child of the king, a child of the king:
with Jesus my savior, I'm a child of the king.

Stanza 2

My father's own son, the savior of men,
once wandered on earth as the poorest of them;
But now he is pleading our pardon on high,
that we may be his when he comes by and by.

Refrain

Stanza 3

I once was an outcast stranger on earth,

a sinner by choice, an alien by birth,
But I've been adopted, my name's written down,
an heir to a mansion, a robe and a crown.

Refrain

Stanza 4

A tent or a cottage, why should I care?
they're building a palace for me over there;
Though exiled from home, yet still may I sing:
all glory to God, I'm a child of the King.

Refrain⁶

You Better Min'

Refrain

Oh, you better min'
Oh, you better min'
You got to give an account at de judgment.
You better min'.

Verse 1

You better min' how you talk,
you better min' what you talkin' about.
You got to give an account at de judgment,
you better min'.
You better min' how you sing,
you better min' what you singin' about.
You got to give an account at de judgment,
you better min'.
(Refrain)

Verse 2

You better min' how you pray,
you better min' what you prayin' about.
You got to give an account at de judgment,
you better min'.
You better min' how you shout,
you better min' what you shoutin' about.
You got to give an account at de judgment,
you better min'.
(Refrain)⁷

Each of the foregoing songs takes us back to a time in the life of African Americans when they faced enormous tests of the human spirit -- a time when others, had they been subject to such difficult and harsh conditions, may have questioned the very existence of God. Yet, the songs

evoke not only a strong spirit of preparation and repentance, but an unwavering faith that: (a) Jesus himself had written their names in the “lamb’s” book of life (the ultimate book of remembrance); (b) they had: “good religion,” “had been redeemed,” “had been to the water,” “been baptized, and were gonna treat everybody right;” and, (c) they were children of the “King.”

Notwithstanding their subhuman living conditions, the songs of our ancestors did not evidence a spirit of doubt, fear or uncertainty. While anchored in vicious forms of oppression, they reminded themselves and each other that Jesus, God’s own son, the savior of humanity, once “wandered on earth as the poorest of them...” and that “though” they themselves were “exiled from home, yet still they could sing...”

Their songs lifted the spirits of our ancestors and enabled them to birth opportunities of freedom, visions of life, and create foundations and pathways for their children’s children. Caught up in a permanent spirit of Advent, they, partnered with the Holy Spirit, anticipated God’s coming and celebrated God’s faithfulness to them. Surely, there must be a lesson somewhere in all of this for us, as we now face uncertain days.

III. Advent Is Opportunity Time

This year, the Christian church has an unusual opportunity to slow the congregation’s desire to rush past Advent to get to the commercialized lights of Christmas. Each day the very foundations upon which this earthly system is based seem to be unraveling at the core. Bleakness is everywhere. Despair and hopelessness are beginning to reign supreme. The country appears to be on the brink of a nationwide depression, the likes of which have not been seen since the nineteen twenties and thirties. Advent is a time of opportunity.

Thousands of Americans, including many African Americans, have lost their homes due to sub-prime loans, tornados and hurricanes, and the nationwide housing foreclosure debacle. Many others lost their retirement, life savings and investments due to bank failures and the recent roller-coaster behavior of the stock market. Also, millions more have been laid off from their jobs due to the weakened economy. Advent is a time of opportunity.

On top of all of the foregoing calamities, the costs of gasoline, home heating oil, food, clothes and other goods have risen to astronomical levels, and wages have not kept pace with inflation. Beyond that, the experts do not yet see the bottom or the end of the failure that is pressing upon the world’s economic systems. Everyone everywhere has been affected by these unsettling conditions and times. Advent is a time of opportunity.

On this third Sunday of Advent, local pastors and worship leaders are likely to encounter a congregation, that, for the first time, is less likely than at any time in the past to be interested in rushing past Advent to the commercialized lights of Christmas. Advent is a time of opportunity.

Yes pastor, on this Advent Sunday you and your staff are likely to encounter a hurting and wounded congregation -- a congregation seeking the very hope, joy, and peace that Advent points to. Advent is a time of opportunity.

If carefully conceived, the church, on this Advent Sunday, through reasoned and exciting sermonic renderings, musical creativity, and inspired worship leaders, can help hurting and wounded congregants reconnect to the divine spirit of joy, hope and peace.

The church can help them put things in a spiritual perspective -- help them to believe that God is able to deliver and sustain. The church can help them renew their spirit of anticipation. An anticipatory spirit engenders a spirit of release and change. Change prepares the soul and body for the new gifts that God has in store for the seeker. These are some opportunities that Advent provide for a praying and creative church.

Church, remember the faith of our grandmothers and grandfathers! Advent is a time of opportunity.

Notes

1. Philippians 4:4, New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
2. U.S. Slave Spiritual, Arr. Hall Johnson
3. U.S. Slave Spiritual/Arr. Lena Mclin. ©1967 Neil A. Kjos Music Co.
4. Lyrics: Kevin Yancey and Jerome Metcalfe. Music: Kevin Yancey, Jerome Metcalfe, Harm. Kenneth Morris ©1979 GIA Publications
5. U.S. Slave Spiritual
6. Lyrics: Harriet E. Buell; Music: John B. Sumner
7. U. S. Slave Spiritual, Arr. Hall Johnson ©1930 Carl Fischer, Inc.