Text: Zephaniah 3:14-20

**Introduction**

The third week of Advent is traditionally called *Gaudete* which is Latin for Rejoice! – a command. “Rejoice and Exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.” And the Hebrew parallelism understands completely that you can’t really have rejoicing without song. “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel.” It even find a place for those of us without great voices.

Of course being commanded to Rejoice! is roughly like telling a depressed person to shake it off. Like I haven’t tried it. If it was within my power to do so, don’t you think I would have done it? Rejoicing, giving voice to joy, has to come from outside of us. It has to be called forth out of us.

One of my favorite Christmas hymns – “See amid the Winter’s Snow” – it is Lutheran Service Book number 373 if you want to look it up later – captures exactly this calling forth, and it why I love it so much. The verses are rather pedestrian and suitably set to an understated tune aptly called humility. See Amid the winter’s snow/born for us on earth below/See the gentle lamb appears/promised from eternal years. But then immediately that simple call to see – to behold what has happened – brings out this gorgeous whole hearted refrain. Hail, O ever blessed morn/Hail, redemption’s happy dawn/Sing through all Jerusalem/Christ is born in Bethlehem. When we understand just what has come to us from outside of us from outside of all creation, such rejoicing, such joy, is the spontaneous reaction of loved seeing the lover.

**Text**

The way that we are taught to write today is to put our topic sentence first, and then you support it with three to four sentences, until you move on to your next point. Ancient writing, and still to this day poetic writing, usually doesn’t follow that. The topic sentence or the most important point is often placed right in the middle. You build up to it, state it, and then reiterate the reasons on the way down. You always went up to Jerusalem and then you walked back down from Zion. We are called up to the mountain, and then bid to go back to the plain.

The “behold”, the important point in Zephaniah is “at that time I will deal with all you oppressors.” This the salvation that comes from outside of us. Yahweh himself will defeat our enemies. At that appointed time Yahweh will come and clear the field. We’ve been singing some of the different versions of Mary’s song, the Magnificat, in this service. Mary also captures one of those moments of rejoicing called out of us. And Mary doesn’t shy away from the conflict. Our version this evening says “powers and dominions lay their glory by/proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight.” The one we sand the first week I think catches it in better poetry, “the proud he scatters, their rule he shatters, sing the greatness of the LORD.” Although they are all just trying to set to music Mary’s original words “he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, he has brough down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate.”

So it is worth pondering who and what Zephaniah says are our oppressors. From whom Yahweh frees us.

“The LORD has taken away the judgements against you.” The very first oppression removed is our sin. We naturally, because the law is written on our hearts, know that we have missed the mark, that somebody has just judgements against us. Right Judgemetns. The LORD has taken away these judgements…against you.

But even if the Lord has had mercy, we sill often fear. We know that we walk in danger all the way. Satan plotting to deceive us. When the fight is fierce and warfare long we know that courage can sometimes fail. The powers and dominions seem so large and we are so small. “You shall never again fear evil…fear not, O Zion, let not your hands grow week, The LORD your God is in your midst.”

But why would the LORD do such a thing for one such as me? There is no explaining love. The LORD has chosen you. “He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love.” You are his treasured possession. “I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.” Even the reproach of our own hearts.

Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And Christ has dealt with sin, and Satan and even our own flesh. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. At that time…when I gather you together…I restore your fortunes before your eyes.

**Conclusion**

Hail, O ever blessed morn, Hail redemptions happy dawn, Sing through all Jerusalem, Christ is born in Bethlehem.

And may that time come quickly…when you gather all your people, and you make them renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth. When the rejoicing in this earthly Jerusalem joins the New Jerusalem. Amen.