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# Shout for Joy, O Daughter Zion!

## Biblical Reflection for Third Sunday of Advent C

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, DEC. 8, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Advent, far from being a penitential time, is a time of rejoicing. Christians proclaim that the Messiah has indeed come and that God's reign is at hand. During these days we are invited to quietly prepare our hearts and our lives for the coming of the Son of God in the flesh.

On this third Sunday of Advent -- known as Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday of rejoicing -- I would like to focus on two important themes found in today's scripture readings: the biblical expression "Daughter of Zion" and what it means to "rejoice."

The rich text of today's first reading from the Prophet Zephaniah [3:14-18a-20] speaks of the Daughter of Zion, the personification of the city of Jerusalem. Let us reflect on the significance of this title of the holy city of Jerusalem and see how and why the Church appropriated the title for Mary, Mother of the Lord.

Daughter of Zion is the personification of the city of Jerusalem. Zion was the name of the Jebusite citadel that later became the City of David. In the many texts of the Old Testament that speak of the Daughter of Zion, there is no real distinction to be made between a daughter of Zion and the city of Jerusalem itself.

In the Old Testament, the title Virgin of Israel is the same as the Daughter of Zion. The image of the bride of the Lord is found in Hosea, Chapters 1-3: It reflects the infidelity of the people to their God.

Jeremiah 3:3-4 speaks of prostitution and the infidelity of the bride. Virginitiy in the Old Testament is fidelity to the Covenant. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul speaks of the Church as a pure virgin. Here, virginitiy is the purity of faith.

Throughout the Old Testament, it is in Zion-Jerusalem that God shall gather together all of his people. In Isaiah 35:10, the tribes of Israel shall gather in Zion. In Ezekiel 22:17-22, the prophet describes God's purification of his people that shall take place "within" the walls of the city, in the midst of Jerusalem.

The Hebrew word used to describe this inner section of the city is "beqervah," a word formed from the root "qerev" meaning something deep, intimate, situated deep within a person. It also means the maternal womb, the intestines, the breast, the insides of a person, the most secret area of one's soul where wisdom, spirit, malice and the Law of the Lord dwell. Therefore, the city of Jerusalem has a definite maternal function in the history of salvation.

In the Christian Tradition

The Second Vatican Council formally called Mary "Daughter of Zion" in the dogmatic constitution on the Church "Lumen Gentium" (No. 52). The Church's appropriation of this title for the Mother of the Lord has a

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rich Scriptural foundation. Mary illustrates the prophecies of the Old Testament that ascribed value to the eschatological role of woman as mother both of the Messiah and of the new people of God.

The title Daughter of Zion evokes the great biblical symbolism of the Messianic Zion. Mary illustrates the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures which ascribed value to the eschatological role of woman as mother both of the Messiah and of the new people of God: the individual person and the whole people being very closely united, in line with the cultural structures of Israel.

For the prophets, the Daughter of Zion was the spouse of the Lord when she observed the covenant. Mary's role as Daughter of Zion, or for that matter any of her roles in the life of God's people, can never be understood independently of Christ and of the Spirit, which he bestows upon all humanity in dying on the cross.

"Lumen Gentium" says that all theology and Marian piety belong to the mystery of Christ and to the mystery of the Church.

Mary, Daughter of Zion, is the archetype of the Church as Bride, Virgin and Mother. It is not only biological virginity, but also spiritual virginity, which means fidelity to the Scriptures, openness toward others, and purity in faith.

Mary's words to the servants at the wedding banquet in Cana (John 2:1-12) are an invitation to all peoples to become part of the new people of God. Mary is the new "Daughter of Zion" because she has invited the servants to perfectly obey Jesus the Lord. At Cana this new Daughter of Zion has given voice to all people.

Both at Cana and at Calvary (in John's Gospel), Mary represents not only her maternity and physical relationship with her son, but also her highly symbolic role of Woman and Mother of God's people. At Calvary, more than any other place in the fourth Gospel, Mary is "Mother Zion": her spiritual maternity begins at the foot of the cross.

As "Mother Zion," she not only welcomes and represents Israel, but the Church, the People of God of the New Covenant. At the foot of the cross, Mary is the mother of the new messianic people, of all of those who are one in Christ.

She who bore Jesus in her womb now takes her place in the assembly of God's holy people. She is the new Jerusalem: In her own womb was the Temple, and all peoples shall be gathered back to the Temple, which is her Son. The Mother of Jesus is indeed the Mother of all of God's scattered children. She is Mother of the Church. Mary is the first Daughter of Zion, leading all of God's people on the journey toward the Kingdom.

I cannot help but recall the words of Cardinal Marc Ouellet of Quebec City, in his profound, opening address to the Synod of Bishops on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" in October 2008: "A woman, Mary, perfectly accomplishes the divine vocation of humanity by her 'yes' to the Word of Covenant and her mission. Through her divine motherhood and her spiritual motherhood, Mary appears as the permanent model and form for the Church, like the first Church."

Rejoice in the Lord

In today's second reading, St. Paul tells us to rejoice in the Lord always [Philippians 4:4-7; see also Philippians 2:18; 3:1;4.4). The rejoicing to which St. Paul invites us, and which forms the heart of the Advent season. But we must ask ourselves, what did persecuted Christians have to rejoice about?

The answer is their relationship with the Lord, which can even become stronger and more intimate in times of

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persecution. Their joy is not in their circumstance; indeed it is often in spite of their circumstance. Rather it is in the Lord.

Sheer joy arises out of a deep and abiding relationship with God that carries the believer through all sorts of trials and tribulations. Rejoicing in the Lord is a sort of adoration, and adoration often takes the form of prayer. Rejoicing constantly leads to praying and praising repeatedly. Since Paul refers to giving thanks after he mentions prayer, it is probable that the term "praying" refers to petitioning God in some form, perhaps interceding for self and others in some manner.

The opposite of rejoicing

The opposite of rejoicing and happiness is not sorrow, but deadness that often manifests itself through cynicism, meanness of spirit and smallness of mind and heart. Many of us know what that feels like: the deadness and dissatisfaction induced by a consumer culture that stimulates our senses and bombards us with largely meaningless choices, while leaving us starved for some deeper purpose.

Then there is jealousy, envy, and that gnawing feeling that we have accomplished so little because we have been so poorly motivated and made some bad choices. And when we realize that others have been able to do much because they have been rooted in God, we become jealous and envious. These are not new phenomena!

The desire to escape such deadness and dissatisfaction was one of the motives of the early desert fathers and mothers. They rejected a world whose agenda was defined by the pursuit of power, property, and pleasure. They went into the desert to tap into the source of life and joy, and discover their own true selves through constant prayer. Having found the emptiness of what their culture defined as happiness, they sought another way.

Let me conclude with the words of Pope Paul VI in his wonderful apostolic exhortation on Christian joy, "Gaudete in Domino:"

"[Mary] has grasped, better than all other creatures, that God accomplishes wonderful things: His name is holy, He shows His mercy, He raises up the humble, He is faithful to His promises. Not that the apparent course of her life in any way departs from the ordinary, but she meditates on the least signs of God, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:19; 51).

"Not that she is in any way spared sufferings: she stands, the mother of sorrows, at the foot of the cross, associated in an eminent way with the sacrifice of the innocent Servant. But she is also open in an unlimited degree to the joy of the resurrection; and she is also taken up, body and soul, into the glory of heaven.

"The first of the redeemed, immaculate from the moment of her conception, the incomparable dwelling-place of the Spirit, the pure abode of the Redeemer of mankind, she is at the same time the beloved Daughter of God and, in Christ, the Mother of all. She is the perfect model of the Church both on earth and in glory."

This Advent, may the example of John the Baptist give us the strength and courage necessary to transform our deserts into gardens, and our emptiness into rich Catholic meaning and experience. May the boldness of St. Paul and the example of Mary, Virgin Daughter of Zion, teach us how to rejoice in the Lord, whose coming is very near.

[The readings for the 3rd Sunday of Advent are Zephaniah 3:14-18a; Philippians 4:4-7; and Luke 3:10-18]

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