

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice...The Lord is at hand," the Apostle wrote.

Here it is, the last liturgy before the Festival of Christmas. The Lord is at hand! The celebration of His first coming is nearer now than it has ever been this season; just three more days! This is cause for rejoicing, and it is cause for there to be rejoicing always and alway. Thanks for the question last week; that the Lord is at hand, that He has come to you before and continues to come to you in His means is cause for rejoicing at all times and in all places. This is true because He came as your brother to be your propitiation; He is your kinsman Redeemer!

Of course, you know also that rejoicing in the Lord always has an element of looking forward. The Lord is at hand, the Apostle wrote, and he did so AFTER Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Paul was not looking forward to celebrating Christmas, nor was he exhorting the Philippians to do so. Besides the fact that early Christians didn't celebrate Christmas, when he wrote, "The Lord is at hand," he was indicating the closeness of Jesus, that He was near and that His coming again was closer than it had ever been, just as he wrote to the people at Rome: "[F]or now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed." (Romans 13:11b)

Of course, there would be no talk of the closeness of Jesus and His coming again without His first coming. You've heard me talk about it every night, during these mid-week liturgies, and I'll say it again, the closeness of Jesus depends wholly on His first coming. He is close to you, not only in that you are in His presence, but in that He is one like you. He was conceived and born like you, and is in every way a man like you, except without sin. Jesus is your brother, and that is what makes Him your KINSMAN Redeemer.

Now, one like you and one with you, he is still God. Conceived, born, raised, crucified, risen, and ascended, He now fills all things and is always present with you. Jesus is especially present in a place like this and at a time like this, to fill you with all good things—with Himself for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. Look up and lift up your heads, for your salvation is near; you could reach out and touch it—you could almost reach out and touch Him.

He comes and will come again for that very purpose, to touch you with His life-giving self, for He is your life and your light. Apart from Him, you are in darkness and as good as dead. That's the accusation of the Law, and apart from Christ, it's condemnation. But Christ took that condemnation for you.

Therefore, rejoice in the Lord always! Or, rejoice in the Lord alway! The Lord is at hand.

Oh, yes, Jesus is coming back. His return is nearer now than it has ever been. The Lord is at hand, and the closer His return, the more jubilant the church should be. Year after year, as one Advent preparation gives way to another, the time of Christ's second advent looms ever nearer. The temptation of the church is to grow weary as one year turns over into next. For nearly 2000 years, the church has been getting prepared; that's an awful long time! Still, the Lord is at hand.

Jesus has promised to return; the promise was spoken through an angel to the crowd looking up in the skies as Jesus ascended. (cf. Acts 1:11) God keeps His promises. He promised that the Seed of the woman would come, and from the womb of Mary that Seed, Jesus the Christ, did come. (cf. Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4-5) He promised salvation through this Seed by way of crushing the serpent's head, removing from him the authority to accuse and condemn you, and in the heavenly battle, Michael and his angels threw the Accuser out of the heavenly council by the blood of the Lamb. (cf. Revelation 12:7-9)

By the same blood, God promised you salvation, and having been washed in that blood, salvation is yours. (cf. Romans 6:3-4)

And, He has promised to raise you from the dead when He returns and bring you to where He is, that you would forever live in His presence. (cf. Romans 6:5; John 14:2-3) He has given you faith to believe this, and by this faith, to trust in His promises. And He has placed you into His Body, the Church, that you may be kept in this one, true faith until His reappearing. Rejoice, the Lord is at hand, and He is coming back for you, because you are in Him. And you are in Him because you are baptized into His conception, birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Here, you are prepared for Him to keep His promise, and that preparation comes by way of the forgiveness of all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.