Today is – to some old timers – Rose Sunday, or Gaudete Sunday for us older timers, of whom I am one. A Sunday on which Paul says “Rejoice, again I say, rejoice”. Do not worry about anything. Put your fears and problems into the hands of God -- with Thanksgiving. And God will guard your hearts and minds. … This from a man who says he was beaten with rods three times; pelted with stones; shipwrecked three times; spent a day and a night on the open sea (and for a man who was NOT a fisherman that must have been terrifying); and was, according to tradition, beheaded by the Emperor Nero. And again, he says, “Rejoice”.

Our rose Advent candle is to remind us to celebrate the joy of expectation – of our saying “come into our hearts and lives” because in seven days we will rejoice in the miracle of Incarnation – God made man.

We rejoice in the expectation of a Messiah…One whom John says will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. We rejoice in the knowledge that God took human form, so we can more readily “identify” with a “real” God – a God who speaks directly to us, weeps for us, and gives us the keys to Heaven. “Here – You are more than welcome to come in and share eternal life with us”.

Welcome is such an important word. It started life as “Come in, be well”. Come, all is well within. Welcome is an intentional gift. A powerful gift. Best given in first person, if possible.

A few weeks ago, thanks to the hard work of a lot of people, we enjoyed our Advent Event. And, I confess, I hadn’t planned to attend. I had a lot of errands to run: things to do; places to be. I was heading out the front door when Nancy Setzer stopped me. “You are coming to the Advent Event, aren’t you”? “Well, no. I’m really busy”. “But you have to eat lunch. Come on, it’ll be fun.” Who can say “no” to that type of persistence. I went, I had fun. I stayed so long I helped with the clean up. And, scored a new advent wreath and candles that I really needed as part of my own Advent practice and traditions.

 *Welcome*. Best delivered in first person, if possible. A few years ago, I was standing in the pasta aisle at Schnucks when I heard my name being called. It was Will Bolden. He grabbed my hand and said, “I’ve been thinking of you. We’ve started a new group – the Ministry of Racial Reconciliation. You need to come.” I’ve had a lot of personal adventures as a result of accepting that invitation. And I’ve met people who share the gospel, without speaking. Who are living “Love One Another” in a constant, life-changing manner.

If you haven’t seen the new, welcome video on our website, please watch it. It’s a work of art. It reveals the love and kindness and joy that being a member of St. Tim’s can be. It’s directly above our Mission Statement: *To radiate Christ's presence through worship, care, service,* and I would add “welcome”. “We love you as we love ourselves.” Come – meet us. Come, be part of St. Tim’s.

This video is especially appropriate for Advent because “Come” is also part of Advent. It’s in our music: “Come, Thou Font of Every Blessing”, “Savior of the Nations, Come”, and “Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel”.. in which each verse an O Antiphon is mentioned.

The Episcopal Networks Collaborative, and our own Diocese of Missouri have posted an Advent reflection on each of the ‘O, Antiphons.” For seven days, from December 17 to 23, the evening service includes an antiphon – a short verse -- that begins with "O" and uses one of [seven names of God](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/great-o-antiphons-advent). For example, O Wisdom, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, etc. These meditations are meant to be read – one each night beginning Monday -- alone, or as a family. Here is a small bit of the meditation provided for “O, Wisdom”.

*We seek wisdom, all too often, in endless varieties of self-help books. We search Google in our quest for truth. Television personalities, politicians, and twenty-four-hour-a-day newscasts attempt to persuade us that they offer wisdom – neatly packaged as easy answers. We gorge ourselves on information, facts, and opinions yet we are never satisfied. Where, oh where, is the true wisdom we seek?*

These meditations are meant to be a guide toward helping us meet the expectations of the coming Messiah. To help us prepare the path and make straight the Way of the Lord.

And speaking of John the Baptist – Luke introduces us to a man often called the last prophet of the Old t\Testament. A prophet who hears the word of God and speaks it. John’s Messiah is not the sweet, darling baby lying in a manger and growing up in a loving family in the backwater town of Nazareth. This long-awaited Messiah has a winnowing-fork in his hand, clearing his threshing-floor, gathering the wheat into his granary. And burning the useless detritus with unquenchable fire. And this, John proclaims, is the good news.

And it is good news – with a warning. Use the rest of Advent to prepare. Review life practices. Start new habits. Be wheat.

Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness. The candle in the window, guiding us home. Jesus is leaving the light on for us. Welcoming us. And for that, we can say “Rejoice”.

Amen