

FIRST READING: Zephaniah 3:14-20 The Lord will renew us by His love
(MEV)

¹⁴ Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you will see evil no more. ¹⁶ On that day it will be said to Jerusalem: Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands be slack. ¹⁷ The LORD your God is in your midst, a Mighty One, who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will renew you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing. ¹⁸ I will gather those who grieve for the appointed festival, which is a reproach and burden on you. ¹⁹ At that time I will deal with all who oppress you; I will save the lame and gather the outcast; I will give them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. ²⁰ At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD.

PSALM: Isaiah 12:2-6 (ESV)

² “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation.” ³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴ And you will say in that day: “Give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted. ⁵ “Sing praises to the LORD, for He has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. ⁶ Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

SECOND READING: Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice! The Lord is near (NRSV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace

of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

GOSPEL: Luke 3:7-18 The preaching of John the Baptist. *(NLT)*

⁷ When the crowds came to John for baptism, he said, “You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God’s coming wrath? ⁸ Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. ⁹ Even now the axe of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.” ¹⁰ The crowds asked, “What should we do?” ¹¹ John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.” ¹² Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptised and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?” ¹³ He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.” ¹⁴ “What should we do?” asked some soldiers. John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.” ¹⁵ Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered their questions by saying, “I baptise you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be His slave and untie the straps of His sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷ He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with His winnowing fork. Then He will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into His barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.” ¹⁸ John used many such warnings as he announced the Good News to the people.