

Introduction: One thing I question as an American is the right ‘to pursue happiness’. Everyone does have this right; but, a cynic would be quick to point out no one has ever succeeded in this pursuit solely on his or her own. God made every human being in such a way that happiness and joy can only be found through coming into, and experiencing, an intimate knowledge of Him. The people who come to know Him on His terms, trusting fully in His Savior Son AND receiving His gracious gift so they can live by His instruction given in the Book He inspired people to write – these are the people who will be filled with His Love! *** Experiencing the wonderful Love of God, in Jesus through The Holy Spirit, is the only source of pure joy in all circumstances, including being disciplined by Father God. The joy that comes to people living as God’s children, doing what He says out of gratitude to Him for who He IS and what He does, results in happiness exceeding anything obtainable by human effort or pursuit. *** The exiled Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in 538 BC learned all this the hard way. Seventy years before this, their grandparents, parents, and those who were age seventy-five and older, had all placed themselves, their desires, and various things above their Covenant God. As a result they were carried to Babylon after Jerusalem was destroyed by fire (2 Kings 25:8-12). Jeremiah said they were to marry and have children in captivity (Jeremiah 29:4-14). But he also said that after seventy years Babylon would be judged and He would restore His people from their captivity in compassion (Jeremiah 25:8-14; 33:4-26). *** This is what our passages in Ezra describe. The returned exiles built a new altar and laid the foundation for the Temple; but, it was not as glorious as the first Temple. However, the prophet Haggai quoted Yahweh as saying its glory would be greater than the former (2:9). *** Luke’s Gospel tells what Jesus did in this second Temple from the time His mother Mary went there for her purification from childbirth. *** Let’s look closer at our passages for this third Sunday of Advent.

I. Cyrus, king of Persia sends God’s people to Jerusalem to build the Temple; they build an altar, sacrifice burnt offerings and celebrate Tabernacles. (Ezra 1:1-4; 3:1-4)

A. In his first year as king, Cyrus invites the remnant of God’s people to go to Jerusalem, each one carrying whatever is needed to build God’s house. (Ezra 1:1-4)

1. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, to fulfill the Word of Yahweh by Jeremiah, He stirred spirit of Cyrus to send throughout his kingdom in writing: Thus says Cyrus, all the kingdoms of earth Yahweh God of heaven has given me, and He charged me to build to Him a house in Jerusalem. (Verses 1-2)

Fulfillment: The word of The Covenant God by Jeremiah about seventy years included a new Temple.

Isaiah: This was 538 BC. One hundred fifty years earlier Isaiah had named Cyrus as the one anointed and chosen by Yahweh to act on behalf of His chosen people Israel (Isaiah 45:1-7).

2. Who of all His people, his God will be with him and he will go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and he will build the house of Yahweh God of Israel, He is God in Jerusalem? (Verse 3)

God with him: Cyrus is asking a question of God’s people: Who will go to Jerusalem to build Yahweh’s house?

3. Each remaining in each place which he is sojourning, he will lift up him, the men of his place in silver and gold and goods and animals with freewill offering for the house of God in Jerusalem. (Verse 4)

Lift up: All God’s people still living as strangers far from home are charged with coming together to carry everything needed for God’s house, and the sacrifices there.

Freewill offerings: Freewill offerings are described in Leviticus (22). The prophetess Deborah praised Yahweh for the men of Israel who freely offered themselves to fight Sisera’s army (Judges 5:1-9).

B. In the seventh month those who returned gather to build the altar, offer burnt offerings, and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. (Ezra 3:1-4)

1. Then came the seventh month and the sons of Israel in the cities were gathered together in Jerusalem. (Verse 1)

Seventh month: This autumn month had the last three of the seven feasts of Israel: Trumpets, Atonement and Booths (Leviticus 23:23-43). It is the last of the three feasts when all men must appear in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16).

2. Then stood up Yeshua ... with his brothers the priests and Yerubabbel ... and his brothers; then they built the altar to offer on it burnt offerings as was written in Torah of Moses, man of God. (Verse 2)

Priest and governor: The son of Yehozadaq was the high priest and the son of Shealtiel was the governor of God’s returned people.

Altar: The altar was for burnt offerings given for consecration to God.

3. Then they established the altar in its place, because terror on them from the people of the lands; then they offered on it burnt offerings to Yahweh morning and evening. (Verse 3)

Terror: The returnees dreaded the people of other nations surrounding them, so they established the altar as an act of faith in God and His Torah.

Application: Worship of the God of grace is how people overcome fear of powerful enemies. God’s perfect Love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18).

Twice consecrated: They made the two daily burnt offerings in accordance to Torah (Numbers 28:1-8).

4. Then they kept the Feast of Booths as having been written, day by day according to the ordinance of the Word each day. (Verse 4)

Booths: This last feast of the worship calendar was to remember how their ancestors lived in booths after Yahweh delivered them out of slavery in Egypt (Leviticus 23:34-36, 39-43).

II. The people thank Yahweh in song at the completion of the foundation; there are triumphant shouts and weeping due to memory; Simeon holds the baby Jesus as Mary purifies herself; then he blesses God because he has seen salvation. (Ezra 3:10-13; Luke 2:25-32)

A. After establishing the foundation of His House the people thank Yahweh in song; they shout in triumph, and weep from memory, so people could not distinguish joy from weeping. (Ezra 3:10-13)

1. They, building the Temple of Yahweh, established foundation; then, stood the priests, being clothed, with trumpets, and Levites, sons of Asaph, with cymbals to praise Yahweh, according to David’s hand. (Verse 10)

Establish Temple: The workers established the foundation on which the new Temple would be built.

David: David told Solomon the pattern for the Temple was by ‘the hand of Yahweh’ upon him for wisdom and understanding (1 Chronicles 28:11-19).

2. Then they responded: ‘Give thanks and praise Yahweh for (is) good / for to eternity steadfast Love of Him to Israel’; all the people shouted, great shout, because had been established the house of Yahweh. (*Verse 11*)
Praise song: This is the same song God’s people sang in the Jeremiah passage from two weeks ago.
Great shout: They shouted in triumph because of what God had done for them! God’s people have Joy because He is behind the rebuilding of the destroyed Temple, and the rebuilding of homes, relationships, and the righteousness of faith.

JOY: God can rebuild what was destroyed

3. Many priests, Levites and chiefs of fathers – elders who had seen the first house; when established this house, in their eyes weeping in a loud voice; and many with a shout with Joy raised voice. (*Verse 12*)
Weeping: People, now seventy-five years old, were five years old when the first Temple was destroyed and still remembered it. So these wept.

Applications: May we seek to comfort those who weep while we celebrate. And, May we all learn to praise God, even when it seems life was better in previous generations. By grace we will know **JOY: God can rebuild what was destroyed.**

Shouting: Those raising shouts of Joy anticipated Zechariah’s prophecy: ‘“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit”, says the LORD of hosts ... For who has despised the day of small things?’ (4:6, 10, NAS).

4. Not the people discerning sound of the shout of Joy from sound of weeping people, because the people shouted with a great shout; and, the sound was heard from a distance. (*Verse 13*)

Not discern: People living beyond Jerusalem could not distinguish between the sounds of the two groups of people. But Haggai would prophecy: ‘The glory of this new Temple will surpass the old, says Yahweh Sabaoth’ (2:9, NJB). Yahweh gave this Word to His people, ‘from this day on I will bless’ (Haggai 2:19).

With this, Yahweh is preparing His people for the coming Messiah!

JOY: God can rebuild what was destroyed

- B. As Mary brings her purification offering, Simeon, led by the Spirit, takes Jesus in his arms and blesses God, saying: my eyes have seen Thy salvation: Light to nations and glory to Israel. (*Luke 2:25-32*)

1. Behold! Man was being in Jerusalem, whose name, Simeon; and, this man righteous and devout, waiting consolation of Israel, and Holy Spirit being on him. (*Verse 25*)

Hearing: Simeon means hearing and he was a righteous and devout man, waiting for God’s consolation (*pa-ra'-klay-sis*, compare *Pa-ra'-klay-tos* – Comforter, John 14:16-26, KJV) for His people Israel.

Spirit upon him: The Holy Spirit was upon him. Jesus would say of the Spirit of truth at the Last Supper, ‘with you all He is dwelling and IN you all He will be’ (John 14:17).

2. It was being to him had been disclosed by The Holy Spirit not to see death before he might see The Christ (Messiah) of Lord. (*Verse 26*)

Revelation: The Spirit graciously revealed to Simeon: God would let Him see Messiah before he died.

3. He came in The Spirit into the Temple; and, to bring the parents the child Jesus ,to do them according to had been custom (to do) of the Torah concerning Him. (*Verse 27*)

In the Spirit: The Holy Spirit graciously brought Simeon to the Temple when Mary was performing her purification for childbirth offering on the fortieth day (Leviticus 12).

4. He himself took Him in his arms and he blessed God and said, ‘Now Thou are releasing Thy servant, Master, according to Thy Word of peace. (*Verses 28-29*)

Takes Jesus: Taking Jesus in his arms, knowing in his spirit He is Messiah, he blessed God in worship.

Release in peace: With Joy he declares he has peace, because God fulfilled His Word to him that he would see Messiah who would rebuild Israel, still crushed under the oppression of the nations.

JOY: God can rebuild what was destroyed.

5. Because have seen my eyes Thy salvation Thou made ready before face of all people. (*Verses 30-31*)

God’s salvation: With Jesus, God is extending His offer of salvation to all people on earth.

6. A light to revelation of the nations and glory of Thy people Israel. (*Verse 32*)

Nations and Israel: In the Temple Herod had updated, non-Jews were only allowed in a court outside the inner Temple court. When Jesus made a new Temple of His body, both the people of Israel and of the nations were included in His Temple on equal footing (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Application: From this, may we be helped by The Holy Spirit to know God has fulfilled His Word, even when it is only partially fulfilled. The new Temple of The Church of Jesus is being built and will one day be complete.

It is better than even the glorified second Temple.

Renewal is better than what went before

Conclusion: Through king Cyrus, Yahweh’s people returned to Jerusalem, built His altar to offer burnt offerings, and celebrated the Feast of Booths. After finishing the Temple foundation they thanked Yahweh in song and shouted to Him in triumph, though some wept at the memory of the first house (Haggai said this latter house would have more glory). Five-hundred-forty years later as Jesus’ mother Mary made her offering at the Temple, Simeon took Jesus and blessed God because he saw the Savior: a light to nations and Israel’s glory.

JOY: God can rebuild what was destroyed.