

- Sunday worship service, December 16th, 1979, Duke Chapel. ("Carol of the Bells" plays) ("O Christmas Tree" plays) ("What Child Is This" plays) ("O Holy Night" plays) (bells chime melodically) (organ plays) ♪ O come o come Emmanuel ♪ ♪ And ransom captive Israel ♪ ♪ That mourns in lonely exile here ♪ ♪ Until the Son of God appear ♪ ♪ Rejoice ♪ ♪ Rejoice ♪ ♪ Emmanuel ♪ ♪ Shall come to thee o Israel ♪ ♪ O come Thou Wisdom from on high ♪ ♪ And order all things far and nigh ♪ ♪ To us the path of knowledge show ♪ ♪ And cause us in her ways to go ♪ ♪ Rejoice ♪ ♪ Rejoice ♪ ♪ Emmanuel ♪ ♪ Shall come to thee o Israel ♪ ♪ O come Desire of nations bind ♪ ♪ All peoples in one heart and mind ♪ ♪ Bid envy strife and quarrels cease ♪ ♪ Fill the whole world with heaven's peace ♪ ♪ Rejoice ♪ ♪ Rejoice ♪ ♪ Emmanuel ♪ ♪ Shall come to thee o Israel ♪ ♪ O come Thou Dayspring come and cheer ♪ ♪ Our spirits by Thine advent here ♪ ♪ Disperse the gloomy clouds of night ♪ ♪ And death's dark shadows put to flight ♪ ♪ Rejoice ♪ ♪ Rejoice ♪ ♪ Emmanuel ♪ ♪ Shall come to thee o Israel ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Of this one thing we may be sure. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one. And of this we may be sure. God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Therefore, I invite you to this prayer of confession. Let us pray. Lord, Thy season comes, Thy fire, Thy shout across our lonely night, and we are not ready. Alas, we are in a winter of fears. We are cold toward the stranger, we crowd toward emptiness, caught up in the safe and mediocre, we avoid division. We miss the burning, we are deaf to the songs, we are ashamed. Now in this Advent, we cry Thy mercy and beseech that in us once more Thy weather might browse and glow. Yea, come and grant us Thy salvation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Let us give thanks, for God is good, and God's love is everlasting.

Congregation: Thanks be to God (muffled speaking) Thanks be to God, Whose grace sustains us. It is my joy to welcome you to this service of worship at Duke Chapel today. We're glad that you're here. Some of you worship here regularly, some of you who are here today are visitors to the campus. We invite all of you to know yourselves to be brothers and sisters in Christ, and we welcome you to this community of faith. We are especially pleased today to have the bell ringers of the First Baptist Church in Henderson, North Carolina, as our guests and as our leaders in worship. Their director is Mr. Philip Van Young. We are grateful to them that they have come, thanks be to God, for the gift of this day. Thanks be to God for each one of you.

- Let us pray. Dear Lord, open our hearts and minds to the hearing of Your Word, that we may find comfort and guidance through the message You have for us. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. The Old Testament lesson is from the third chapter of Zephaniah verses 14 through 18. "Sing aloud, oh daughter of Zion. "Shout, oh Israel. "Rejoice and exalt with all your heart, "oh daughter of Jerusalem. "The Lord has taken away the judgements against you. "He has cast out your enemies. "The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst. "You shall fear evil no more. "On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, "'Do not fear, oh Zion. "'Let not your hands grow weak. "'The Lord your God is in your midst, "'a warrior who gives victory. "'He will

rejoice over you with gladness. "He will renew you in His love. "He will exalt over you with loud singing "as on a day of festival. "I will remove disaster from you "so that you will not bear reproach for it." The Epistle lesson is from the fourth chapter of Philippians, verses 4 through 7. "Rejoice in the Lord always. "Again, I say rejoice. "Let all men know your forbearance. "The Lord is at hand. "Have no anxiety about anything, "but in everything by prayer and supplication "with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God. "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, "will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Here is the reading from the Epistle, Amen. (bells chime melodically) Will the congregation stand for the reading of the Gospel lesson. The Gospel lesson is from the third chapter of Luke, verses 10 through 18. "And the multitudes asked him, "What then shall we do?' "And he answered them. "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none. "And he who has food, let him do likewise.' "Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?' "And he said to them, "Collect no more than is appointed you.' "Soldiers also asked him, 'And we? "What shall we do?' "And he said to them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation. "And be content with your wages.' "As the people were in expectation, "and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, "whether perhaps he was the Christ, "John answered them all, "I baptize you with water, "but he who is mightier than I is coming, "the thong of Whose sandals I am unworthy to untie. "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. "His winnowing fork is in his hand "to clear the threshing floor "and to gather the wheat into his granary, "but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. "So, with many other exhortations, "he preached good news to the people." Here ends the reading from the Gospel. All praise and glory be to God, Amen.

(organ plays) ♪ Glory be to our Creator ♪ ♪ Praise to our Redeemer ♪ ♪ Glory be to our Sustainer ♪ ♪ Ever three and ever one ♪ ♪ As it was in the beginning ♪ ♪ Ever shall be ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Sometimes it doesn't work out to submit a sermon topic 10 days ahead of time, as we who preach in the chapel must do. Thus, the sermon topic for this morning, I would like to share with you, is taken from the Philippians passage, which was read as our Epistle lesson for this third Sunday in Advent. The topic is Rejoice in the Lord Always. Let us pray. Now may the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts truly be acceptable in Thy sight oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. There are some passages in Scripture that make absolutely no sense whatsoever, or may even seem absurd, certainly at times unbelievable. Some passages are just too much. They cannot be true or accurate or descriptive or normative for life, for faith, or for Christian living. And yet some of these words are in Scripture. One such passage for me is the Epistle lesson for this third Sunday in Advent, Philippians 4:4-8. These words, it seemed to me, are some of those words which reveal the real skandalos, the skandalos of the gospel, the sheer unbelievability of the Word, the high demands, the extraordinarily high expectations of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. For Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always. "Again I will say rejoice." And then he goes on to say, "In everything, in everything by prayer and supplication "with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Some passages of Scripture give me difficulty because they are too hard or are too demanding or are too clear for me or are too mysterious or too profound. But not these words. This passage for me is too inclusive, too comprehensive, too complete. It is too total. "Rejoice," Paul says, "always. "In everything "give thanks. Now pray tell me this morning, who rejoices always? And who gives thanks in everything? When I read and hear these words, "Rejoice in the Lord always," I'm reminded of a dear and highly-respected professor of mine, Dr. William Stinespring, who taught Old Testament in the Divinity School when I was a student here. Uncle Dudley, we affectionately and respectfully called him. And every

time any one of us would say, "This word always means" or "this passage always says" or "one should always use this word this way," dear old Uncle Dudley would pause and put his fingers together or put his hand to the side of his mouth and purse his lips and say, "My dear friends, always is a bad word. "You should never use always." Clearly wanting us to know that nothing in Scripture or in life is ever true always, in other words, there is always an exception to always. Rejoice in the Lord always. Or are these words just words and not really intended for us to take them at face value? When Paul tells us to rejoice in the Lord always, are these just empty, meaningless, ordinary words, not to be taken seriously? These words are in the imperative mood. We are told to rejoice in the Lord always. This is a command, a directive, or an order from Paul to the church, to us today. "Rejoice in the Lord always." But then there is a reason. There is a reason, a cause to rejoice always. Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always, "for the Lord is at hand." Zephaniah writes, "The Lord is in your midst. "The Lord your God is in your midst," he says. That is cause to rejoice, even always. The Lord is at hand. But I find it awfully hard to rejoice today. I even find it hard to rejoice in the Lord today. I'm reminded of a passage in Nikos Kazantzakis' immortal book, Zorba the Greek. Zorba is speaking to his friend known as Boss. Some of you remember that Zorba's world was really not unlike the world of ours today. It was pictured as a world in which millions were sinking into despair because they hadn't a crust of bread to sustain their bodies or their souls. At one point, Zorba says to Boss, "Boss, let people be! "Don't open their eyes. "For if you do, they will see. "And you know what they will see? "They will see their misery. "Leave their eyes closed," he says, "unless when they open their eyes, "you can show them a better world "in which they are living." So I want to cry out to Paul this morning. Paul, don't talk to us. Don't open our eyes. Don't show us, don't speak to us and say to us, "Rejoice in the Lord always," unless you can show us cause to rejoice, otherwise please, dear friend Paul, let us keep our eyes, our ears, our hearts, our very lives closed and locked and sealed. Life will not hurt as much that way, you see. Life is tough, Paul, but it is really much harder on those who have seen a better way and yet still suffer and are denied and deprived. How can you rejoice in the Lord always? If, as is the case with our own Willy Mason here in the Duke community, if your apartment has burned up completely, and if indeed, as is the case with Mr. Mason, this is the second time all of your earthly possessions have burned within the space of four years' time, and if you have two grandchildren who suffered terribly from the burns, and if one of your daughters dies in the fire, rejoice always? Could you or I rejoice just now, this moment, this morning if a brother or a sister or son or daughter or even a very close friend of ours was one of the 50 hostages in Iran just now? 43 days have gone by, my friends. Patience gone, anger and fear welling up inside those who are close to those who are held hostage. Rejoice always? How could you rejoice this morning? If one of the 11 youths killed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania recently, when thousands of young people swarmed the doors to get into a rock concert, how could you rejoice this morning if one of these young persons was a brother or sister or very close friend of yours, one who had been crushed and died? Absolutely absurd behavior, crazy, wild, animal behavior. How could we rejoice? "Rejoice always," Paul writes? Now you begin to see why I find Paul's words so absolutely unbelievable and unthinkable and incongruous for life and faith and for Christian living. He must've been out of his head, weird, crazy maybe even, a religious fanatic perhaps. But then it occurred to me that Paul is simply calling for what he has experienced. For Paul has come to know a profound, real, present, lasting joy in the Lord. And this joy for Paul is always with him. Therefore he writes, "Why not expect it to be present "and alive and real for all Christians?" Why not rejoice always? Further it also occurred to me that it is as you and I experience the polarities of life that we come to know the meaning of life. It's only when you're thirsty that a cup of water really tastes good. It's only when you're absolutely, utterly all alone that a presence has

meaning, real meaning. When you are in absolute pitch darkness, then just a little candle gives much hope, doesn't it? When you have been sick, very seriously ill, then good health takes on new meaning, doesn't it? Or when you have been worried and anxious about the unknown, some word of certainty and surety brings relief, doesn't it? After the storm calm always has a new beauty, doesn't it? If you have been rejected and put down, then, then you come to know appreciation and affirmation. Perhaps it is only as we experience the polarities of life that we know the meaning of life. Then perhaps those who have known suffering and sadness and estrangement and loss and separation most can appreciate what it is to rejoice in the Lord always. Perhaps in the life of obedience and faith that Paul had lived, he had earned his credentials and had had the experiences and had earned the right to tell us to rejoice in the Lord always. Listen to how Paul describes, not boastfully but, I presume, just factually the life which he lived. Five times he said, "I have received at the hands of the Jews "the 40 lashes less one. "Three times I have been beaten with rods. "Once I was stoned. "Three times I have been shipwrecked. "A night and a day I had been adrift at sea, "in danger from rivers, robbers, from my own people, "from the Gentiles, in toil and hardship "and hunger and thirst, in cold and exposure." He also was sick off and on all of his life, and spoke of a thorn in the flesh that God gave him, he said, "to keep me from being too elated." Epilepsy, hysteria, who knows? Sometimes his depression was so great that one gets the feeling that Paul could hardly take his pencil and take it from one side of the page to the other. Frederick Buechner, in his book Peculiar Treasures, writes about Paul, "The ups and the downs, "the fights with his enemies, "and the fights with his friends, "the endless trips with a fever and with diarrhea, "keeping one jump ahead of the sheriff, "giving his spiel on windy street corners "with nobody much to hear him. "Where was it all going to get him in the end? "Where was it all going to get all of them "or any of them in the end? "When you come right down to it, what was God up to "for God's sake? "Sending them all out, prophets, apostles, evangelists, "teachers, the whole tattered bunch, "to beat their gums and work themselves into an early grave? "Is this what it was all about?" Yes, as one reads this description of Paul's life, one must say that he had earned the right to speak to us and to say to us, "Rejoice in the Lord always." One who has been through all of that surely has a right to say to you or to me no matter what our troubles, "Rejoice in the Lord always, "and again I say rejoice." My friends in Christ, on this third Sunday in Advent, nine days before we celebrate again the birth of Christ the King, Christ our Lord, Christ our Savior, it is hard to rejoice. It was hard for Zephaniah and his people, it was hard for Paul and the early church, and it is hard today. Zephaniah is addressing a slum of the northern kingdom, refugees from Jerusalem they were. And he tells them, "Rejoice "and shout aloud." Rejoice and shout aloud an unexpected and unwarranted call to joy in the midst of almost total distress for these people. The prophet is telling the people that joy is not rated or is not maintained by happy or good circumstances, but that joy is quite simply something that is received. Zephaniah is pronouncing the presence of joy. It is available, he says. Joy is, in the words of CS Lewis, the "utter reality." And Zephaniah writes again, "Fear not oh Zion. "Be not discouraged. "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty Savior. "He will rejoice over you with gladness "and renew you in His love. "He will sing joyfully because of you "as one sings at festivals." For the prophet, joy is, first and finally, what is happening all around. Paul also, in writing to the Philippians from his prison chains, pours out his heart, calling for them always and in every way to know and to experience joy. The New Jerusalem Bible says, "I want you to be happy. "Always happy in the Lord. "I repeat, what I really want is your happiness." Zephaniah and Paul in the Word for today are calling us to wholeness and holiness. They take us far beyond our existential conditions and our happy feelings to another source, I believe, to a bottomless well where joy is drawn and received in obedience and in faithfulness. They know and tell us, and this was a new insight to

me this week. I don't know what you have thought joy is or how it comes or how we experience it. But I think they are telling us that joy finally is a decision that we make. Joy is something we decide for or against, something we accept or reject, something we enter into or walk around, something we let into our lives, or is something we keep out. Living in joy or out of joy is, in the final and important moment, something that we choose to do or choose not to do. It's like Viktor Frankl, the German psychiatrist who spent many months in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. And one of his writings says, "There is one freedom "that no one and nothing can ever take away from any of us. "And that one freedom which no one and nothing "can ever take away is the right to choose one's attitude "in any given set of circumstances." I guess that may be why God's Word constantly makes the choice for or against life our choice. "Choose you this day whom you will serve. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. "I put before you this day life or death. "Choose you. "If anyone will come after me, let him or her come unto me. "Come, take up your cross and follow me." Choice, choice, choice. If you and I are waiting on God to give us a fault-free environment, or an anxiety-free atmosphere, or a risk-free way of life, or a tension-free life to live, then I think we had best forget it. Not any or all of these will ensure our happiness or our joy. I am convinced that joy is, finally, a decision that each of us makes or does not make. You and I can choose life, or we can choose death. We can choose to be miserable. We can choose to be joyful. You can choose to wallow, to be lost, to be estranged and to be separated, to be alone, to be alienated, to be empty, to be sad and lonely and heartsick and woeful and sinsick, or you can choose life. You can choose to be joyful. We simply are called in these passages to recognize the joy of the Lord in our midst. Recognize it, trust it, believe it, and receive it. Receive it as did Mary, poor, little old innocent, God-chosen Mary. "Do not be afraid, Mary, "for you have found favor with God. "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, "and you shall call his name Jesus." All she had to do was receive it. Receive it as did Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for God has visited and redeemed His people. Receive it. Receive it as did the shepherds in the fields. "And the angel said to them, 'Be not afraid, "'for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy, "'which shall be to all the people. "'For to you is born this day "'in the city of David a Savior.'" Receive it. Receive it as did the aging Simeon, who said, after seeing Jesus when Jesus was brought into the Temple, "Lord, now let us Thy servant depart in peace, "for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." All he did was receive it. Every once in a while, you come across a line or a word or a truth that really registers clearly and forcibly on you. It may not be anything new or it may not be written in a novel way, but all of a sudden it just hits you, and the meaning comes clear. It's sort of like a student was telling me this week after studying for a religion exam. In reading in 1 John chapter 3 verse 11, the words, "For this is the message which you have heard "from the beginning that we should love one another." And the student said, "I read that, and I had heard it. "I probably had even read it many times before, "but when I read that I said, 'Yeah! "'That's the truth!' "And it's been there from the very beginning." Well, in a way similar to that, I came across a word or a statement the other day by Fr. Murray Bodo that had a similar impact on me. He writes, "The presence of God in your life, "you cannot merit "such an experience." That's not new. It's not novel. It's not cleverly written, but the impact, my friends, was very real to me. So I read them. And I read them again. "The presence of God in your life, "you cannot merit such an experience." And I read them again. And I reflected, and I meditated on the words. And then I prayed. I prayed about these words, and then I said, "Yes, that is it. The presence of God, the presence of God in our lives, you, we, we cannot merit such an experience. We really cannot. We cannot earn it or deserve it or work for it. But then thanks be to God. Even if we are never aware of God's presence or of God's closeness with us, God is still dwelling within us and around us. We

simply have to commit ourselves to make a decision to accept it and recognize God's presence. I have come to believe that those people who make space in their lives for joy, those who prefer joy at some times over everything else, those who really desire the reality of joy, those who earnestly seek to find and experience joy and live joy, those who pray for joy, those who decide for joy are those who will experience joy. The Lord your God is in your midst. Barbara Hitsquith writes in her book, *A Sunday in the 30s*, these words. She writes about her Uncle Frank. "My Uncle Frank," she says, "who lived in New York City "and had a beautiful Mexican mistress "who was always trying to bring him back to the faith. "My Uncle Frank was an atheist. "But he used to say, "'All I know about Jesus is "'He never used a gun, "'He had no use for money, "'He never burned anyone at the stake, "'and by God He never turned His back on anybody.'" By God, He never did. And never does turn His back on any of us. Rejoice in the Lord, Amen. (organ plays) ♪ Come Thou long expected Jesus ♪ ♪ Born to set Thy people free ♪ ♪ From our fears and sins release us ♪ ♪ Let us find our rest in Thee ♪ ♪ Israel's strength and consolation ♪ ♪ Hope of all the earth Thou art ♪ ♪ Dear desire of every nation ♪ ♪ Joy of every longing heart ♪ ♪ Born Thy people to deliver ♪ ♪ Born a child and yet a King ♪ ♪ Born to reign in us forever ♪ ♪ Now Thy gracious kingdom bring ♪ ♪ By Thine own eternal spirit ♪ ♪ Rule in all our hearts alone ♪ ♪ By Thine all sufficient merit ♪ ♪ Raise us to Thy glorious throne ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Let us affirm what we believe. We believe in God, Who has created and is creating, Who has come in the truly human Jesus to reconcile and make new, Who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust God, Who calls us to be the church, to celebrate life and its fullness, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen, our Judge and our hope in life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone, thanks be to God. The Lord be with you.

Congregation: And with your spirit.

- Let us pray. Almighty God, Thou Who art the Author and Finisher of all things, almighty God, Thou Who hath set stars in their course, Thou Who hast placed this planet Earth in her orbit, Thou Who dost establish the boundaries of the oceans, and hast numbered the sands of every desert, we whose mortal lives are of briefer space and time, seek now to know Thee, to know Thy presence, to trust Thee, to rejoice in Thee, yea, to adore Thee. And give to us, oh God we pray, understanding that we may seek Thee. Give to us wisdom that we may know Thee. Give to us desire that we may love Thee. Obedience, that we may serve Thee, reverence that we may honor Thee. How clearly, oh God, the heaven revealed Thy glory. How plainly the reaches of space show all that Thou hast done. Thy power and wisdom shine from every star. Thy sovereignty stretches from horizon to horizon. But now, oh God, today in this gathered congregation, in this holy place, in this time of prayer, enable us to know Thy presence in clearer ways, to read Thy name in nearer lines, to hear Thy voice, oh God in softer sounds. Each day announces Your sovereignty to the following day. Every night repeats it to the next. No speech or words are used, no sound is heard. How silently, how silently the blessed gift is given. Oh God, in the silence of this moment, reveal to us Thy presence, Thy justice, Thy grace. Thanks be to Thee, oh God, for the blessed sun that will light every land today. Thanks be to Thee, oh God, for Thy steadfastness that is seen in moon, that is shown on every race that has ever lived on this earth. Their voice goes out to the whole world who'll be heard to the ends of the earth today in the jungles of Cambodia, the deserts of Iran, the ancient cities of Europe, the seats of every government, and in this university cathedral. Both sun and moon are known, so let Thy truth, oh God, today

touch every land. Bless our dark world with Thy near presence, and make us all rejoice. Hear the nearness of our own prayers, oh God, for we have sinned. Forgive our sins, and let the very present Christ speak to us of sins forgiven. Hear our near prayers, oh God. We are burdened. Renew our souls, and let the very present Christ speak to us of souls renewed. Come near to every seeking heart, oh God, and make Thy very present Word our guide to heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who have taught us when we pray to say, "Our Father, who art in heaven, "hallowed be Thy name. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done "on earth as it is in heaven. "Give us this day our daily bread, "and forgive us our trespasses "as we forgive those who trespass against us. "And lead us not into temptation, "but deliver us from evil." For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen. (bells chime melodically) ("Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring" plays) (organ plays) ♪ Praise God from whom all blessings flow ♪ ♪ Praise Him all creatures here below ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Praise Him above ye heavenly host ♪ ♪ Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Alleluia ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Thanks be to Thee, oh God, who hast blessed us with steadfast love and mercy. Thanks be to Thee, oh God, that Thou hast not turned from any one of us. Receive us then and these our gifts through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (organ plays) ♪ Joy to the world the Lord is come ♪ ♪ Let earth receive her King ♪ ♪ Let every heart prepare Him room ♪ ♪ And heaven and nature sing ♪ ♪ And heaven and nature sing ♪ ♪ And heaven and heaven and nature sing ♪ ♪ Joy to the earth the Savior reigns ♪ ♪ Let men their songs employ ♪ ♪ While fields and floods ♪ ♪ Rocks hills and plains ♪ ♪ Repeat the sounding joy ♪ ♪ Repeat the sounding joy ♪ ♪ Repeat repeat the sounding joy ♪ ♪ No more let sins and sorrows grow ♪ ♪ Nor thorns infest the ground ♪ ♪ He comes to make His blessings flow ♪ ♪ Far as the curse is found ♪ ♪ Far as the curse is found ♪ ♪ And far as and far as the curse is found ♪ ♪ He rules the world with truth and grace ♪ ♪ And makes the nations prove ♪ ♪ The glories of His righteousness ♪ ♪ And wonders of His love ♪ ♪ And wonders of His love ♪ ♪ And wonders wonders of His love ♪ ♪ Amen ♪

- Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. (bells chime melodically) ("Angels We Have Heard On High" plays)