

Rediscover Christmas

Finding Joy in Our Discouragements

Luke 1; Various Scriptures

Joy is the trait we're exploring today on this third Sunday of Advent. If you've been journeying with us the past few weeks toward Christmas, you know that we have been celebrating Advent. As a quick recap, the word **Advent** means "**coming**" or "**arrival**," and the season is marked by expectation, waiting, anticipation, and longing. Because Christ has come to be God with Us, we can experience joy no matter what discouragement we may be going through.

_____ and _____: A Mother's Joy

There's a lot of joy throughout the biblical Christmas story, especially early in the story. But it's important to note that this joy isn't separate from pain and disappointment. In fact, much of this joy is born out of long disappointment and grief. We're going to look more closely at this as we explore the stories and experiences of Elizabeth and Mary. Luke tells us, "**And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed *is* she who [a]believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.'**" (Luke 1:41-45, NKJV).

Her joy came bursting through as well, and she sang and praised and thanked God:

And Mary said:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy *is* His name. And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him

From generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones, And exalted *the* lowly. He has filled *the* hungry with good things, And *the* rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of *His* mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.” (Luke 1:46-55)

There is much we can take away from this story, but I’d like to focus on three points that we can apply to our own experience with joy.

1. Joy Is the Proper _____ To God For Every Christian – and _____.

My point here is that our longing for happiness and joy is a natural desire that God has placed within us as a reflection of His own joyful nature. Whatever term we want to call it, the most important part is our *source* of joy and happiness.

2. When We Are Joyful, The _____ Is Our _____.

So, here’s the beauty in the midst of this scene. The Bible tells us, **“Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10, NKJV).**

“Celebrate! Enjoy it!” Nehemiah says. Why? Because this is a time for happiness that God has brought us back and is restoring our city and our hearts—and because our source of strength is the very joy of the Lord. It’s what fuels us and sustains us. Our true source of happiness, joy, and fulfillment comes from Christ. Christmas is a season of joy because the Messiah has brought joy into the world and provided us the way of ultimate fulfillment and life. Peter describes it like this: **“whom having not [a]seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.” (1 Peter 1:8-9, NKJV).**

An inexpressible and glorious joy sounds like deep stuff, the kind that finds its source even deeper than our pain and sorrow and the problems that can bury us. It's a deep well that we draw upon, no matter what we are facing.

3. The Joyful Life Is a _____ We Make.

There are a lot of uses of the word *rejoice* in the Bible. It's not a word that we use very often in our culture, but maybe we should. Rejoice is the verb form of joy. It's the action of feeling or expressing joy and delight. So to rejoice is to return to joy. It's a choice and an action we can take to return to joy. I'd like to add that for us, it is a return to our source of joy; it's a return to Jesus.

And it's in this process that the apostle James's words make sense, when he encourages us, **“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces [a]patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be [b]perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (James 1:2-4, NKJV).**

Friends, let's rediscover Christmas this year by embracing joy, no matter what we're going through. Let's remember each day the source of our joy. Let's seek our happiness, not in the seasonal trappings and traditions around us, but in returning constantly to our source of joy. Let's choose to continue the process of rejoicing, despite the pain and challenges we are facing. what.

Benediction

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