



All I want  
for Christmas!  
HOPE, PEACE, JOY, LOVE

DEVOTIONAL

2023





*Week 3*

*JOY*

Saturday, December 9th and Sunday, December 10th

# The Weekend-A Recap

**Spend some time this weekend reflecting on your experience of worship (whether online or in-person). Use the following questions to help guide you through this reflection.**

Which part of the message encourage or challenged you the most, and why?

If you were to restate the message in one sentence, what would it be?

What would it take for you to choose joy?

What if Christmas wasn't about the gifts we receive but the gift we are becoming?  
How does that shape how you choose to celebrate Advent?

**PRAYER** God of Joy, thank you for the excitement and delight we experience at this joyful time of year. Help us to share your joy with others, so that they too will be filled with your spirit.

Amen.

## LISTEN

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1. There's a song in the air! There's a star in the sky!  
There's a mother's deep prayer and a baby's low cry!  
And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,  
for the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

2. There's a tumult of joy o'er the wonderful birth,  
for the virgin's sweet boy is the Lord of the earth.  
Ay! the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,  
for the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!

3. In the light of that star lie the ages imperaled;  
and that song from afar has swept over the world.  
Every hearth is aflame, and the beautiful sing  
in the homes of the nations that Jesus is King!

*Song in the Air*

You can listen to the song below



Monday, December 11th

# Celebrating Advent

Gather your family together over dinner, invite over some friends, or feel free to Zoom or Facetime them. You can also celebrate individually.

Music is such an important part of expressing our faith in ways that extends beyond words. It's also such an important part to celebrating Advent. The beautiful thing about music and faith: you don't have to be an expert. In fact, the bible is clear that we can make a joyful noise (God cares a great deal about our intentions).

So whether you or those gather around you are musical performers or you are experts in making a joyful noise, sing together Joy To The World before lighting the next candle. If its too uncomfortable, you can also simply listen to the words being sung instead. Find a version you like on youtube and join in. The words are included here:

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King!  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

2 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.

Turn down the lights, gather around the Advent wreath, and read aloud **Luke 1**. Pay attention to how many times JOY is mentioned.

**Light the pink candle and spend a few minutes in silence.**

**Thank you, God for the flame of joy. As we prepare for Christ's coming, help us experience and share with others the joy that can only come from resting in your presence. Amen.**

Tuesday, December 12th

# Joy Is Mysterious

*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"*

**Luke 1:41-45**

The story of Elizabeth and Mary is truly special (and kinda crazy too). When Elizabeth, who was thought to be barren and too old to give birth, was six months pregnant, she was visited by Mary who was also carrying a miraculous child (Mary was a young virgin). Both of their stories come as a shock. They were not only very unlikely to have children when they did, but the timing of their births would have had their lives drastically changed.

For Elizabeth, she waited with longing for a child and she ends up having one later in life. This came with a whole lot of shame around it. Besides the unlikely possibility apart from a miracle, this would have been a geriatric pregnancy filled with all kinds of risks. For Mary, she was young and was never married. The fact that she was pregnant apart from marriage would have also brought her (and her family) a great amount of shame. Plus there was the whole having to journey to a foreign country because a powerful leader wanted to find the child. Both of their lives were unexpectedly changed.

This story reminds us that joy is not the absence of fear, or disbelief, or uncertainty, or sorrow. In fact, joy exists despite all the reasons why it shouldn't. Both Elizabeth and Mary were filled with joy regardless of how crazy and disruptive their circumstances were. We are reminded that regardless of what is happening in our lives, joy can and does break in. Joy is the sign and reminder that God is still working, still loving, still fulfilling promises made! And while it may seem impossible to find joy, it is after all mysterious and can come in unexpected ways.

## PRAY

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Guide us to joy even when it feels impossible God. We recognize that true joy comes not from external circumstances but from Your presence God that remains with me through all things. May my heart resonate with the song of the angels, declaring glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward all. Amen.



# Grounded in Joy

## PUTTING JOY INTO ACTION

### **Do you have a favorite Christmas tradition that brings you joy?**

This can be going Christmas caroling in the neighborhood or seeing a Christmas concert. It can be going around and looking at Christmas lights or decorating your own space.

There's also baking, crafting (sewing, building, etc...), shopping, visiting someone, giving gifts, ice skating, coloring/painting, hosting a Christmas cookie exchange, watch Christmas movies (bonus if it's Muppets Christmas Carol), volunteering, doing a Christmas scavenger hunt, and so many other ideas you can google!

### **Pick something you haven't done yet this season and go and do it! Block out at least 30 minutes if not more!**

I encourage you do this because it's fun and not because you are being ask to do it! So truly pick something you would enjoy doing. Allow yourself to have fun and to be fully invested in the present moment with whatever you decide to do. This means turning off any distractions.

### **When you are finished come back to reflect and journal about your experience using the prompts below.**

- *How was your experience? How did you feel during this time set apart for something fun?*
- *How does this experience of joy teach you something about life? About God? About your relationships with God?*
- *How can you share joy with others this season?*

Thursday, December 14th

# Joy Is All Around

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Romans 8:35; 38-39**

The closer we get to Christmas the more our schedules fill with gatherings and celebrations. These are brief moments with family and friends where there are opportunities to encounter joy in abundance. The laughter of friends sharing a joke or good conversation over a cup of warm coffee or cocoa, the shared stories and memories recaptured from family members, the smiles and excitement from little ones excited for Christmas, the beauty of decorations and glimmering lights that dot the landscape around us. Joy is all around us--if we just look around we can find it!

Even in the midst of the winter cold, nature offers its own form of beauty and joy in abundance. The delicate frost on a windowpane, the crispness of the air, and the quiet stillness of a snow-covered landscape. They can be seen as minor annoyances, or they can be little reminders of joy.

In a world that often rushes by in a blur, the Advent season calls us to slow down, to open our hearts, and to be fully present in the gift of the present moment which is filled with abundant joy.

So as you go and enjoy the season, be fully present in these gatherings, savoring the joy that comes from the bonds of love and the togetherness that this season brings.

## GO AND DO

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The greatest gift that we could ever receive was the gift of God's presence. We too can give that gift to others. So this season challenge yourself to:

- Attend a meeting or go to work and bring yourself 100% into the room;
- Enjoy every bite of a holiday meal without multitasking while you eat,
- Invite someone you haven't had a chance to really get to know for some coffee;
- Bake some cookies and take them to your immediate neighbors. Spend some significant time having a conversation.

Friday, December 15th

# Joy Is Caring

*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

**John 10:10**

There is little doubt that our culture can sometimes be obsessed with positivity that forces us to be grateful or optimistic or to find a bright-side in all things. Our daily lives are far more complexed though. It's perfectly ok to have day's filled with ups and downs. There are going to be moments that stink, just as there will be moments of happiness. You'll find hope and peace and joy easily in one moment and then in a quick blink you'll find them completely impossible in another moment. It happens.

Many of us have responsibilities that involve caring for others at some point in our lives. This could be an aging parent or a young child. It could be a sick relative or friend, or perhaps a close friend. There will be moments as we care for them where challenges may seem daunting and overwhelming. We will go through times where our hearts feel heavy, burdened by the responsibility of nurturing and supporting another. This will happen, even if we think we are super-human when it comes to compassion.

Yet, as we embark on this journey of compassion, we are called to discover a profound and transformative truth—joy can be found in the act of caring for others through life's difficulties. Yes, much like hope and peace, joy doesn't exist as an either/or to difficulties, but as a both/and.

The beautiful thing about this truth though is that if we are intentional with finding joy while in the midst of caring for another whenever we feel like we are running on empty, we will create a brief respite where we can regroup and jump back in without reaching compassion fatigue or worse, burn-out. We don't need to create false narratives of positivity to be ok. We don't need to pretend to have everything all together. All we need to spend time reconnecting with joy.

## REFLECT

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Have you ever been surprised by the presence of God or a moment of joy or abundance during a particular season of tragic time?

What plan can you make today to cross paths with joy? What prayer can you pray, asking for new life and joy for this season?