ADVENT WEEK 3 – JOY (Light the two purple candles and pink from previous weeks at this point.)

Read John 15:1-11

There's a feeling common to most of us; it usually comes on in late afternoon or early evening Christmas Day. After all the presents have been opened and the food has been eaten, you look around at the remnants of Christmas morning and a sense of sadness begins to creep in. All the buildup over the last month—the decorations, the music, the parties, the shopping—has led to this moment, and now it's over. Christmas melodies fade into post-Christmas melancholy.

We end the day feeling this way because in our hearts, we know there is more. We are left wanting. The happiness we experienced surrounding the celebration isn't enough. See, happiness is built upon the things around you—it is fragile and it cannot last. But real joy is something different. It is a deep-rooted gladness that remains regardless of circumstances. It is the feeling of safety and security that comes only through great union with Jesus. It has to be fought for, but it is worth it. Joy outlasts pain and hard circumstances, and it certainly outlasts the disappointment you may feel as you near the end of Christmas Day.

In His coming, Christ brought about this kind of lasting joy. Through His life, death, and resurrection, we have something much less fragile than fleeting feelings of happiness. We have Him, and in Him we have all that we need. He has given us a new identity, His full acceptance and approval, and freedom to walk confidently knowing we are cared for and loved.

When we put our hope in the right place and receive the love of Christ—the Savior whose birth we are so close to celebrating in just two days—we get to then walk out in joy, and that is far better than the fleeting happiness our world has to offer.

Family Time (Light the final purple candle at this point while stating this is the "JOY Candle". It reminds us of the Joy Jesus bring for those who trust and follow Him.)

Talk about these questions with your family or group.

KIDS

1. What are you most excited about for Christmas Day?

2. What does the day after Christmas usually feel like?

TEENS AND ADULTS

3. Why does worldly happiness never last? How have you experienced the lasting joy that comes from Jesus in your life?

4. Is there a situation in your life right now where you need to fight for joy? Why is it tempting to settle for less?

5. Have you found your identity or purpose in fragile, fleeting, worldly things? In what areas of your life would true joy in Christ change things?

Pray

Thank God for the joy we have because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Pray that it would be clear to you where you have settled for worldly happiness instead of joy. Pray God would give you ways to share the joy you have in Christ with others as Christmas approaches.