

## **Week 3 - JOY**

**Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, Day 15 – Josh Tracy**

**Welcome** – Hello, and welcome to Vespers for the Advent season. My name is Josh Tracy, and today is the third Sunday of Advent, December 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Centering** – As we begin our time of reflection and devotion, let's take a moment to center ourselves.

Make sure other distractions are quieted for the next few minutes.

If possible, bring your body to complete rest.

As you become aware of the stillness around you, focus on your breathing as we inhale and exhale slowly together.

Breathe in, exhale.

Breathe in, exhale.

Breathe in, exhale.

**Responsive Prayer** – As we continue in prayer together, speak the words of this responsive prayer.

LEADER – God of love

RESPONSE – May this season remind us of your steadfastness

LEADER – Christ of hope

RESPONSE – May this season remind us of your promises

LEADER – Spirit of peace

RESPONSE – May this season remind us of your comfort

LEADER – As it was from the beginning,

RESPONSE – So now, may the joy of this season burn in our hearts

TOGETHER – Amen

**Reading – Isaiah 35:3-6, 8-10**

3 Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.

4 Say to those who are of a fearful heart,

“Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God. He will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.”

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;

6 then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness  
and streams in the desert;  
8 A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people;  
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.  
9 No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.  
10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with  
singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

### **Theme Exposition –**

You know, I'm going to be honest with you: usually, when I write or work on something like this—a video scrip, a sermon, a class, blog post, article, anything, really—I try and touch on the range of emotion or spectrum of experience. I think it's a good practice, reflecting the more accurate rhythms of our lives. Even the past few weeks, I've talked about hope in the midst of despair, God choosing to love us even though we're broken. I thought about doing the same thing here with joy...but I think I'm going to take a break, at least for this week.

Yes, much like love, joy is a choice and we can choose to be joyous regardless of the circumstance. But instead of doing this balancing act, I want to really focus on this: how beautiful it is to have a season where joy takes center stage.

The passage from Isaiah speaks to a God who takes great joy in making the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, and the mute speak. And I'm immediately reminded of another story: a barren woman miraculously with child, of Elizabeth, a relative to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Do you remember this story, perhaps one that slips by during the Advent season? Of a priest and his wife, who was barren and “getting on in years” as it says in Luke 1?

God blesses them with a child, but the even more joyous occasion comes when Mary comes to Elizabeth's house. Luke 1, starting in verse 41 says, “when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was

filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”

What makes you leap during this season of advent? What gives your heart such joy that it feels like it may burst out of your chest? What makes you feel the Spirit of the Lord upon you? This week, focus on that joy. Be mindful of Jesus entering into our presence, and do not be afraid to bask in the gift of a joyous heart.

Amen, and Amen.

**Candle Lighting** – As we light the third candle of Advent, the joy candle, we reflect on the joy that came in the form of a baby. A crying, needy, vulnerable, beautiful, perfect little boy. The joy of Elizabeth and her unborn child. The gift of the Spirit, and the joy of knowing that God sent his son to be with us.

**Benediction** – Thank you for spending time with us today. As you continue this week, may the JOY of the Advent resound in every part of your life. If you will, speak these words with me as we conclude:

ALL – Lord of hosts,  
Who breathed the words of creation and  
spoke the Word of the Incarnation  
Ignite our imaginations  
Fill us with awe and wonder  
Prepare the way, within and without  
For unto us, a Child is born  
Unto us, Emmanuel is given  
Bring us Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace  
As we receive, once again, Your greatest gift to the world  
Amen, and amen

Join us every day of Advent for a time of reflection and devotion.  
May God go with you through this season of JOY.  
Blessings, dearly beloved.