

Matthew 2

We continue today to focus on the four virtues of Advent. This week, we will focus on joy. Our reading starts in the 2nd chapter of Matthew. In this chapter The Magi visit the Messiah.

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

*⁶ “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”*

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Escape to Egypt

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

*¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”*

The Return to Nazareth

¹⁹ After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, ²³ and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Advent helps us remember and honor the birth of Jesus and it helps us look forward to His coming return. The four Sundays of Advent are recognized as each Sunday celebrates the four virtues...of hope, love, joy and peace. In Him, from the moment we accept Him as our savior, we have hope, love, joy and peace inside our hearts. We have hope for our future, love all around us as a child of God, joy that grows as each day passes, as we know what lies ahead and the peace of God that transcends all understanding. These are the gifts we carry throughout our lives. Hope, love, joy and peace are seen in Jesus’ birth and His sacrifice to save the world from sin and death, but also in our anticipation for the future, when He returns to restore His creation. We will live with Him. These Sundays prepare us for His future arrival. It is a time to focus on the gift of His sacrificial love and on our future hope of life eternal with Him.

The rose candle symbolizing joy is for Gaudete Sunday and Gaudete means “rejoice.” He is our reason to rejoice. Joy is the praise-filled assurance that God is in control and working everything out for our good and His glory.

As this candle of joy is lit and next week when the one for love, we can take time to truly think about what Christmas means. He came to earth to save the world. He is our Joy. Remember what He did for us, coming to earth as a human, but also what He will do in the ages ahead. He will return for us. In Jesus we have a forever Home. We know our future. There is so much more ahead to look forward to with joy. Advent reminds us that our relationship with Him will someday be one where we see Him face to face.

Let’s pray...

Father God,
Heavenly Father,

You are our King. Thank You for the gift of Your Son.

In this, the third week of Advent, let us remember the good news of Jesus’ birth has changed everything for us.

If our lives are hard and challenging, let us think of all You have waiting for us, the place You have prepared for us. We know that “better” is ahead and that our hope is forever new in You.

If we are ill, let us know that You are taking care of us and that You have already placed eternity inside our hearts. As we age, we do not have to fear because the same power that took the Lord Jesus out of the grave, and restored Him to life, is shining brightly inside us. Because He lived, we too, will live. Lord, Your birth, death and resurrection are the power, the center of our lives.

If we know loss of loved ones, because of You, we also know we will be reunited with the ones we love, and that we have forever ahead with them. We have so much more time ahead with them than what we had here. We can look forward to that reunion with anticipation and a full heart.

You bring us great joy this Christmas season when we remember how You sent Your Son to save us all, and You are the source of our daily Joy. Our joy grows even deeper every year as we know You are coming back and we every day, we are closer to seeing You face to face every day. We can anticipate that with joy that grows deeper year after year.

Our joy is internal and eternal, it isn't dependent on what is going on in our life, in our world, our health, our work, our situation or even the people around us. It doesn't depend on the gifts we find under the tree. No earthly thing can ever give us joy. Our joy comes from you. The joy that flooded the hearts of the shepherds, the angels, the wise men, the hosts of heaven, and Mary and Joseph is the same joy we know today.

You, are our Joy.

Our joy is a gift. It is the gift that you gave us that first Christmas in Jesus Christ. Our joy will never leave us. Father, flood our hearts with joy this Advent season as we reflect on the good news of Jesus' birth and in His return.

In Jesus' precious name we pray.

Amen