

Sunday, December 14, 2025 - ADVENT 3: JOY TO THE WORLD IN FAITH – Pastor John Henry Raskin

The third Sunday of Advent celebrates **Joy**—the joy found in faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior. This joy is not dependent on circumstances but is rooted in the hope and peace that come from God's promises and salvation.

Key Scriptures

1 Peter 1:3-9

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials... you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls."

Isaiah 12:2-3

"Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For Yah, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.' Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

Luke 1:26-38

"Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!... For with God nothing will be impossible."

Luke 1:39-45

"Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Luke 1:46-55 (The Magnificat)

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior... For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name."

Nehemiah 8:10

"Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Summary Points

- **Joy is a gift from God** that comes through faith, even in times of trial.
- **Mary's faith** in God's promise brought joy and fulfillment, as did Elizabeth's and Joseph's trust in God's plan.
- **The Holy Spirit** fills believers with joy, pointing always to Jesus as Savior.
- **Christmas is a celebration** of God's salvation—eat, drink, share, and rejoice, for the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Reflection

As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, let us remember:

True joy is found in faith in Christ, the hope of salvation, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let the joy of the Lord be your strength this Advent season!

ADVENT 3: JOY TO THE WORLD IN FAITH

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

For the last two weeks we have been discovering the meaning of Advent, a Christmas tradition that causes us to reflect and to prepare.

We have reflected upon God's grace and mercy 2000 years ago in sending us a Savior born of a virgin as the Prophets foretold.

We also reflected upon the world around us, much of which is still in darkness and does not share the hope and peace that we have in Christ Jesus.

We are preparing our homes and our hearts for the celebration of the remembrance of that glorious birth of Christ.

We are preparing too in the hope of His coming again as glorious conquering King.

Hopefully, we are also preparing ourselves to be messengers of the peace and goodwill in Christ Jesus about which the Herald Angels sang throughout this coming year.

The last two weeks of Advent had themes of Hope and of Peace.

Today is the 3rd Sunday of Advent and the theme for this Sunday is Joy.

As we saw last week, the early Church was heavily pressured by opposition from unbelievers and the ruling powers around them.

The hope and the peace that they had was in their faith in Christ alone.

In this scripture we hear from Peter, the most prominent leader of the early Church, writing to the churches and encouraging them to add to their hope and peace, joy.

1 Peter 1:3-9

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

As Peter states so eloquently in this scripture, the completion of our faith is the salvation which is only found in Christ Jesus whom although we do not know we love.

It is our faith in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ alone that brings us joy inexpressible even in times of trial.

This connection between faith and joy is a recurring ongoing theme in the scriptures and unites Old Testament with New Testament.

Last week we looked at Isaiah 11 where we saw that when Christ returns, he will bring peace on earth, a peace that includes not only peace among the nations but extends even to nature and the animal kingdom.

Isaiah follows up in the next chapter by speaking of God's salvation and the joy that accompanies His salvation at the appearing of Messiah.

Isaiah 12:2-3

**Behold, God is my salvation,
I will trust and not be afraid;
'For Yah, the Lord, is my strength and song;
He also has become my salvation.'** ”

**3 Therefore with joy you will draw water
From the wells of salvation.**

Jesus brings the joy of salvation.

Jesus brings joy in all areas of life, both present and eternal, but the joy that is especially associated with Christ's birth is the joy of salvation.

Jesus' very name means salvation, Yeshua in Hebrew is Yah Shua or “God saves”.

This week I want us to see the connection that the Bible makes between faith in our salvation and its resultant joy.

I have always been impressed by the faith of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The story of Mary in the Gospel of Luke is a beautiful portrait of the continuing theme in the scriptures of the close connection between faith and joy.

Hear the Word of the Lord...

Luke 1:26-38

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible.”

38 Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

I've always been particularly impressed with Mary's response to Gabriel's words after her first shocked query of “how can this be?”.

Upon hearing that the Spirit of the Lord will be her child’s Father, she simply answers... “Behold the maid servant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”

Pure faith.

Earlier in the 1st chapter of the gospel of Luke we read of the priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth who were like Abraham and Sarah, old and unable to conceive.

The Lord blessed them with an impossible child as well, the one whom we know as John the Baptist.

In the scripture we just read we found out that Elizabeth is an older cousin of Mary.

Most Biblical scholars have declared Mary to have been a teenager, perhaps 14 to 16 years old based on their knowledge of ancient times and customs.

Remember that Mary was an unmarried, although betrothed, Hebrew woman.

Under the laws of the old covenant, she would have been stoned to death for being found “with child” on the suspicion of adultery.

It would be easy to imagine how terrified she could have been.

But her faith overcame her concerns.

We see her story unfold as Chapter 1 of Luke's gospel continues...

Luke 1: 39-45

39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,

40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 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. 42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 45 Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

It is very likely that Mary undertook her hasty journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth alone, because of disapproval from her parents whom we don't hear anything about in the scriptures.

In those days older cousins often took on the role of Aunts or mother figures.

In any case the scriptures we just read revealed God's plan.

This meeting with her cousin is Mary's confirmation that her faith in the angel's word is justified.

The moment Mary enters her house, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and tells Mary that she is blessed BECAUSE she believed.

In these scriptures we see that the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit of God that “overshadowed” Mary and caused her to be “with child”, informs Elizabeth of the Savior, the Hope of Israel who is now inhabiting Mary’s womb.

We see that the child who is to be John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth’s womb for joy.

I love this scene. Mary enters the house, and John the Baptist, who was filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb, starts jumping for joy!

Why? Because as Elizabeth put it, Mary was the mother of her Lord!

Jesus is Lord, in Mary’s womb and John was in close proximity with Jesus who was to be born to bring salvation for His people.

And so John begins jumping with joy in his mother’s womb.

And you might wonder, how is that possible?

Well, it’s because he, as well as his mother and the baby Jesus were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Here we have two of the members of the Holy Trinity in one house.

You have God the Spirit filling John the Baptist in Elizabeth’s womb and God the Son growing in Mary’s womb.

I want to take a moment to talk about the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

Now the Holy Spirit’s role is to glorify Jesus as Savior. That’s what the Holy Spirit does.

The Holy Spirit's job is to get excited about Jesus!

And so when Jesus enters the house in Mary's womb, John the Baptist who is filled with the Holy Spirit gets excited about Jesus because the Savior has come!

This is the same Holy Spirit that inhabits you and me as believers and followers of Jesus Christ.

This is the Holy Spirit who first caused us to believe and Who lives in us here and now!

We are looking back at the scriptures that proclaim and describe the circumstances under which Jesus was born.

That same Holy Spirit that overshadowed Mary and filled Elizabeth with the supernatural knowledge of the Christ in Mary's womb is the same Holy Spirit Jesus sent to fill us on the Day of Pentecost.

The Guide, The Comforter, The Counselor... and the One who is excited and gets US excited about Salvation and Who Jesus IS!

We may look at these scriptures and find it impossible for us to put ourselves in Elizabeth or Mary's position and certainly these were unique times and exceptional circumstances,

but it was the faith of Mary and Elizabeth that allowed the Holy Spirit to operate in full power to bring Jesus forth

and it is the faith of those that belong to Christ today that allow Him to operate in the present in the power of His Might to fulfill His Purpose.

I find another impressive example of faith is found in Mary's fiancée Joseph.

You can imagine, as Mary's betrothed husband, how angry, shocked and embarrassed he might have been to find his intended bride with child.

However, in Matthew's Gospel we see Joseph's measured response to the situation.

Matthew 1:18-26

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

I've always found it difficult to put myself in Joseph's position.

If it wasn't for Joseph being a just man, and his faith to accept the word of the angel because he knew the scriptures and believed the promises of the prophecies of the Savior to come, he could surely have put an end to this story quickly.

To me, Joseph is the untold hero of this story because he had the faith to stand back and let God be God and in so doing went on to become a good father to his glorious, adopted Son who happened to be the Hope of Israel.

The scripture we are about to read further delineates and escalates the connection between Mary's faith, the hope of salvation, and its resultant joy!

This scripture is commonly known as the Magnificat or the song of Mary.

Luke 1:46-55

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

**48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.**

**49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His name.**

**50 And His mercy is on those who fear Him
From generation to generation.**

**51 He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.**

**52 He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
And exalted the lowly.**

**53 He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich He has sent away empty.
54 He has helped His servant Israel,
In remembrance of His mercy,
55 As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and to his seed forever.”**

In her song of praise, Mary proclaims that her soul magnifies the Lord in response to her spirit rejoicing in God her Savior.

I want you to note that Mary proclaims that Jesus her son has come for the salvation of Abraham and his Seed forever.

I want to point out what the apostle Paul said about Abraham and his seed and the promise of salvation...

Galatians 3:29

29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

On this day of Advent which commemorates the joy of the Lord we celebrate God our savior in Christ Jesus.

We reflect upon His birth, His atoning death on the Cross and His resurrection while we prepare for His glorious return.

We celebrate the peace that we have because of the hope of salvation, which is the reason for our joy!

In the Book of Nehemiah, when the captives returned from Babylon, they found a ruined Jerusalem and a destroyed temple.

They had been 70 years in captivity and over a hundred more years after that without a public reading of the book of the law, the Torah.

In Nehemiah chapter 8 the Governor Nehemiah calls on Ezra the Priest to assemble the people and publicly read the Word of God, the Torah. The people drink the word of the Lord thirstily as if from a cold stream.

Then Nehemiah and Ezra threw a great feast for the people of Judah and the people celebrated the return of faith in joy.

Hear the Word of the Lord in the Book of Nehemiah...

Nehemiah 8:10

10 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.”

The people celebrated as they felt the warmth of hope for the first time since their cold captivity and a great time after that.

This was a prefiguring of the greatest hope the world has ever known.

The birth of the Messiah after 400 years of Prophetic silence that we celebrate at Christmas.

This scripture should remind us that Christmas, the real Christmas, is a time of praise and worship, and a celebration when we eat the fat, drink the sweet and send gifts to those for whom nothing is prepared because Christmas Day is holy to the Lord.

And most of all, let's remember these words even in the midst of trials, tribulations and the darkness that still exists in the world, as we shine brightly with the light of Christ...

“Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”