

North Summit Church
Above Every Name: Joy
December 7, 2025

Introduction

We began our Advent journey with Mary's Magnificat – her song of praise after the angel announced she would bear the Messiah. We learned that gratitude flows from recognizing God's sovereign grace in the midst of our insufficiency.

Mary's response was surrender: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

- But Luke's gospel doesn't leave Mary alone with this impossible announcement. After the angel departs, Mary does what any of us would do – she goes to someone who might understand. She travels about 80-90 miles from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth.
- Turn with me to **Luke 1:39-45**.

[Read Luke 1:39-45]

- Mary arrives. She enters. She greets Elizabeth. And the joy of the Lord overwhelms.
- The baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cries out, and shouts with joy:

"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!"

- This is Advent joy. Not manufactured happiness, not forced cheerfulness. This is joy that erupts from recognizing what God is doing.
- Elizabeth is our third witness in this series "Above Every Name." And she teaches us the good news that our dark world desperately needs to understand:

Joy is the response of a heart that recognizes the supremacy of Christ.

This morning I want to look at three truths from Elizabeth's recognition:

- **First, joy comes from recognizing what God is doing, and who Christ is, not in circumstances**
- **Second, joy is a gift of the Spirit.**
- **Third, joy multiplies in community**

Let's unpack this...

1. Joy comes from recognizing what God is doing, and who Christ is, not in our circumstances.

- Before we can understand Elizabeth's joy, we need to understand Elizabeth's situation. Luke tells us she and Zechariah "were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old." For decades, she lived with the shame of barrenness in a culture that saw it as God's disfavor. She calls it her "disgrace."
- Now she's six months pregnant in her old age...a miracle. But her circumstances are still complicated. Her husband Zechariah has been mute for six months because he doubted the angel's message. Living in the midst of God's blessing and human brokenness.
- So when Mary walks through her door, Elizabeth's circumstances are not what we would often consider favorable.
- And yet, God's Word tells us that this exchange was characterized by faith.
- Why? Because **joy isn't just an emotion you wait for.**
- **Joy is a virtue that develops as we put our faith in the sovereignty of God.**
 - Elizabeth's response as John the Baptist leaps for joy in her womb, is pure joy.
 - She doesn't say, "I'm so happy because my life is finally going well." She says, "The baby leaped because the Lord is here."
 - Through her years of faithful service Elizabeth has developed spiritual eyes to see what God is doing. Even though she doesn't fully know the end of the story...she recognized divine reality breaking into the ordinary, learning to rest confidently in God's faithfulness.

- Look at verse 43: ***"But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"***
- **My Lord.** She sees a pregnant teenager cousin and recognizes the Lord of heaven and earth in her womb.
- That's not just emotional response. That's cultivated virtue. That's years of faith in God's sovereignty producing the ability to discern his presence through the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - **Joy is a gift of God's grace that comes when we surrender to his will.**
 - Elizabeth surrendered to being barren for decades. She surrendered to God's timing. And in that surrender, she developed eyes to see what God was doing even when it didn't make sense.
- The feeling of joy that erupts in this moment didn't come first. The faith came first. **The feeling follows faith, not the other way around.**
- Elizabeth had been aligning her perspective with God's purposes for years. She'd been trusting his goodness when circumstances suggested otherwise. She'd been believing that God sees, that God knows, that God acts...even when she couldn't trace his hand.
- And when Mary walks through the door, all of that cultivated faith produces an eruption of joy.
- **This is so different from how our culture thinks about happiness.** We think: "If I can just get my circumstances right, then I'll feel happy." We're waiting for the emotion to show up based on favorable conditions.
- But biblical joy works the opposite way. **Joy is aligning our choices and perspectives with what's truly good – with God's character and purposes – and that alignment produces deep feelings of joy.**
- Paul writes from a prison cell in

Philippians 4:4:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

- How can he command rejoicing? Because joy isn't primarily a feeling you wait for...it's a practice you cultivate. It's a choice to surrender your perspective to God's sovereignty even when you can't see how the story ends.

- She had developed faith in God's sovereignty. And that faith gave her eyes to recognize his presence and purposes in the moment.
- **This is the dynamic process of joy:** You grow in understanding God's goodness. You cultivate trust in his sovereignty. You practice recognizing his presence. And over time, this develops into a state of being – a posture of heart that can erupt with joy even in difficult circumstances.
 - It's not that Elizabeth ignored her difficult circumstances. It's that she'd learned to see God working in, through, and despite those circumstances.
- **This is the heart of the Advent season.**
 - Far too often we try to manufacture the feeling of joy through decorations and traditions and the perfect Christmas experience. And when circumstances don't cooperate – when family is dysfunctional, when finances are tight, when grief is fresh – we allow our circumstances to rob our joy.
 - But joy isn't about achieving favorable circumstances. **Joy is about developing the faith to recognize God's presence and purposes no matter what circumstances you're in.**
- **The question for us during Advent is not:** "How can I get my circumstances right so I can feel joyful?"
- **The question is:** "Am I cultivating the faith to see what God is doing even when I can't see the bigger picture?"
 - Can you recognize Christ's presence when your health is failing?
 - Can you trust God's sovereignty when relationships are strained?
 - Can you align your perspective with his goodness when finances are tight?
 - Can you surrender to his purposes when grief is heavy?
- This is a daily practice. This is a state of being that you develop over time.
- Elizabeth shows us that joy comes from recognizing what God is doing and who Christ is...not from waiting for circumstances to improve.
- She'd spent years developing the virtue of joy through faith in God's sovereignty. And when the moment came...when the mother of her Lord walked through the door...that cultivated faith erupted in recognition and rejoicing.

- **That's the joy Elizabeth models. Not happiness that depends on everything going our way, but joy that springs from recognizing God's presence because we've trained our eyes to see him at work.**

2. Joy is a gift of the Spirit.

- Now here's the question: How did Elizabeth recognize what Mary was carrying? How did she know?
- Mary was only days pregnant. No visible signs. No baby bump. No announcement. Nothing to tip off an observer that this teenager was carrying the Messiah.
- And yet Elizabeth knows immediately.

"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

- That's the answer. **The Holy Spirit revealed it to her.**
- The Holy Spirit filled her and enabled her to see what natural sight could not perceive.
- **This reminds us that it is all grace. 100%, undeserved grace.**
- And this is crucial for understanding biblical joy: **Joy is not something you manufacture. Joy is something you receive.**
- Our culture has it completely backward. We've bought into the "Pursuit of Happiness" – the idea that if we just gratify our passions and desires enough, we'll finally be satisfied. We think joy comes from getting what we want, accumulating what we crave, pursuing what makes us feel good.
- **Selfishness will never produce true joy in your life.**
 - The new relationship, the bigger house, the better job, the perfect vacation – none of it produces lasting joy if you're looking to created things to do what only the Creator can do.
- **Happiness is circumstantial and temporary. Joy is in the goodness of a gracious God and eternal.**
- Biblical joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Paul lists it in

Galatians 5:22

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

- Fruit isn't manufactured. Fruit is cultivated and grown. You can't force an apple tree to produce apples through sheer willpower. You plant it, water it, give it sunlight, and the tree produces fruit according to its nature.
- The same is true with joy. When the Holy Spirit fills you, when you're rooted in Christ, joy is the natural fruit that grows.
- Elizabeth didn't wake up that morning thinking, "Today I'm going to be joyful." She was filled with the Spirit, and joy erupted. Pure grace.
- So if joy is a gift of the Spirit and not a product of human effort, then **the path to joy is not pursuing your own happiness or gratifying your desires. The path to joy is positioning yourself to receive the Spirit's work.**
- **How do you do that?**
 - **First, by staying connected to the vine.** Jesus says in

John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

- Joy comes from abiding in Christ. Not from achieving more. Not from accumulating more. Not from gratifying yourself more. But from staying connected to Jesus through his Word, through prayer, through worship, through community.
- **Second, by being filled with the Spirit.** Paul commands in

Ephesians 5:18

"Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

- This isn't a one-time event. It's an ongoing filling. A daily, moment-by-moment dependence on the Spirit's presence and power.

- Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit, and she saw what others couldn't see. She recognized the Lord where others would have seen only an ordinary pregnant young girl. And that recognition produced joy. That is a grace that is available to us everyday if we listen to the Spirit's leading in our lives.
- If you're struggling with joylessness – if the Christmas season feels more burdensome than beautiful – don't pursue happiness through gratifying your desires.
 - **Don't look to created things to satisfy you.**
- **Instead**, ask the Spirit to fill you, and lead you and guide you. Ask for eyes to see what he's doing. Ask for the ability to recognize Christ's presence in the ordinary moments of your life.
- **Because joy shows up not when you achieve it, but when you notice what God is doing.**
- **Joy is a gift of the Spirit, not a product of human effort.** The Lord was present in her home, and the Spirit opened her eyes to see it. **Grace upon grace.**
- The same is true for us. Christ is present. Emmanuel – God with us. The question is:
 - **Are you willing to allow the Spirit to help you recognize what He is up to?**

3. Joy is experienced and multiplied in community.

- Now let's look at something crucial about this passage: Elizabeth's joy doesn't happen in isolation. It happens when Mary arrives.
- When Mary arrives at Elizabeth's home. Two women carrying two impossible promises encounter each other, and joy erupts.
 - Elizabeth cries out. John leaps. Mary responds with the Magnificat. Their joy amplifies and echoes and multiplies in each other's presence.
- **This reminds us that joy is experienced and multiplied in community.**

- Have you ever tried to celebrate alone? You receive good news, but there's no one to tell. You want to rejoice, but there's no one to rejoice with. The joy feels muted, diminished.
- But when you share that good news with someone who genuinely celebrates with you? The joy multiplies. It grows. It becomes fuller.

Romans 12:15

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

- Joy is meant to be shared. Life in the kingdom is communal, not isolated.
- **Mary needed Elizabeth.** She needed someone who would understand, who would recognize what God was doing, who would celebrate with her rather than shame her.
- **And Elizabeth needed Mary.** She needed to be reminded that God's purposes are bigger than her own story, that her son would prepare the way for the Lord himself.
- Their joy multiplied in each other's presence.
- **This is why we gather.** This is why we don't just do life alone. This is why we need each other.
- Because recognizing Christ's presence is easier when we're together. Joy is fuller when it's shared.
- Look at what Elizabeth says to Mary in verse 45: *"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"*
 - Elizabeth affirms Mary's faith. She strengthens Mary's resolve. She reminds Mary that what God has promised, God will accomplish.
 - And Mary responds by singing the Magnificat...a great song of praise. Mary's song flows out of Elizabeth's affirmation and joy.
- This is what Christian community does. We recognize Christ in each other. We strengthen each other's faith. We amplify each other's joy.
- So let me ask you: **Who is your Elizabeth?** Who can you go to and say, "I need someone to recognize God's work with me"?

- And equally important: **Who is your Mary?** Who needs you to affirm their faith, to celebrate God's work in their life, to help them recognize Christ's presence?
- **There is one more thing to notice:** Elizabeth and Mary's circumstances weren't identical. But their joy was united because they both recognized the same Lord.
- You don't have to be in the same life stage to rejoice together. You don't have to have matching experiences. You just have to recognize the same Lord and celebrate his presence together.
- **That's the beauty of the church.** Young and old, rich and poor, different backgrounds and different stories – but one Lord, one Spirit, one joy that unites us all.

CONCLUSION & COMMUNION

- Today, Elizabeth's story invites us into true joy. Not because our lives are perfect. Not because we've achieved the ideal. But because we recognize Christ's presence with us.
- The baby in the manger is the Lord of heaven and earth. His name is above every name. And when we recognize him – really see him, really know him – joy is the inevitable result.

[COMMUNION]

- So this week, I want to challenge you with three questions:
 - **First, where do you need to stop waiting for favorable circumstances and start recognizing God's presence?** What would it look like to rejoice not because everything is going well, but because the Lord is with you?
 - **Second, will you ask the Holy Spirit to fill you and give you eyes to see?** Will you position yourself to receive the gift of joy rather than trying to manufacture it?
 - **Third, who do you need to share your joy with?** Who can you invite into your recognition of Christ? Who needs you to amplify their joy?
- Elizabeth and Mary met in a doorway and joy erupted. Two women carrying impossible promises. Two women recognizing the same Lord.
- That same Lord is present with us today. Emmanuel – God with us. His name is above every name.

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. **The sermon emphasized that "the feeling follows faith, not the other way around."** Think about a difficult season in your life when circumstances weren't favorable. Looking back, can you identify ways you grew in faith during that time even when you didn't feel joyful? How might that experience help you trust God's sovereignty in your current circumstances?
2. **Elizabeth recognized Christ's presence immediately because she was "filled with the Holy Spirit."** The sermon challenged us to position ourselves to receive the Spirit's work rather than trying to manufacture joy. What are the practical ways you stay "connected to the vine" in your daily life? What obstacles or distractions make it hardest for you to abide in Christ in this season of your life?
3. **The sermon contrasted the cultural "pursuit of happiness" through gratifying desires with biblical joy as a gift of the Spirit.** Where are you most tempted to look to created things (relationships, achievements, possessions) to satisfy what only the Creator can provide? What would it look like to surrender that area and ask the Spirit to give you eyes to see what God is doing instead?
4. **Elizabeth and Mary's joy multiplied when they came together in community.** Who is your "Elizabeth"—someone who helps you recognize God's work and strengthens your faith? And who is your "Mary"—someone who needs you to affirm their faith and celebrate what God is doing in their life? What's one specific way you could share or amplify joy in community this week?