

# JOY

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**Today we are investigating week three of Advent, and the word JOY.** We lit the third candle on our Advent wreath, the candle of joy. Gaudate. Rejoice! Pink candle, in honor of the Virgin Mary.

**Week one we looked at HOPE.** The idea that as human beings we do not have all the answers, but that God does.

Hope is anticipation of a good thing going to happen, and the confidence that comes with knowing it will happen.

**Last week, week 2, we looked at PEACE.** True peace, just like hope, is not sustainable or even attainable between human beings. Tenuous at the best of times. True peace comes only from knowing God, and freely letting go into the spiritual reality of our lives.

Philippians 4:7 *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus'*

Isaiah, called the Christ child, the Prince of Peace. The living bridge between us and God.

**Today is a JOYFUL day.** Hallelujah! God be praised! On a scale of 1 -10, Joy would be a 9-10. Opposite end of the spectrum. Despair. Absence of hope. Absence of peace. The presence of pain, and darkness, and feeling alone and unloved. Anguish.

So why are we looking at these words? Hope, Peace, Joy? What is the relevance of these words in our lives? Surely we are way more civilized than the people of the Old Testament. Why do we need to consult Scripture at all? We're way more savvy than those guys walking around in Birkenstocks and bathrobes. Right? Wrong.

Hope, peace, and joy are just as relevant today as they were almost 2000 years ago, and I would argue we need those concepts today almost more than people 2000 years ago, because we live in a world which can be toxic to mind, body and soul.

**Just consider, Christmas the highlight of the family year,** is also the most stressful time of the year, with the highest number of suicides, the highest credit card charges... the most likely time to have a falling out with someone near and dear.

So how can we get ourselves some of this joy that is on offer... and what is joy again?

Joy is an unconditional, undiluted, uninhibited, unadulterated, unambiguous, pure **disposition...**

Joy is the unedited unimaginable delight you feel at only rare moments in our life as an adult, but on a daily basis if you are a child, or a dog.

Is there a difference between happiness and joy? Sure is!

Happy is good, but not in the same league as joy. Happiness and joy... happiness short lived... latest toy, gadget, good meal, bargain on Amazon.com Joy runs deep in the soul.

**Everyone wants to be happy. We make this a lifelong pursuit.** The pursuit of happiness. Spending money, collecting stuff. Always searching for new experiences, new acquisitions. But if happiness depends only on our circumstances, what happens when the toys rust, health deteriorates, and the party is over. **Joy is the quiet confident assurance of God's love at work in our lives- that he will be there no matter what.** Happiness depends on happenings, but true joy, just as peace and hope, depend on God. See the theme that is developing here?

You want hope, you need God.

You need peace, you need God.

You crave joy..... turn to God.

In the Christmas story we hear about a joyful event that happened... to a group of shepherds.

The shepherds were out in the fields outside Bethlehem, when they saw a great light, and heard an angel speaking to them.

**Luke 1. But the angel said to them Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord.**

**A great company of the heavenly host....** We are so used to hearing the Christmas story, that sometimes we forget the awe and wonder that must have been present on that night.

**Angelic choir...** can you imagine!! Mormon Tabernacle Choir, with Pavarotti in full throttle singing O Holy Night!

Now that is serious J-O-Y!

**Sometimes Joy can creep up on us unawares. We are not expecting it.** C.S.Lewis described how it was to become a Christian, and called the book, 'Surprised by Joy'. A deep seated breath taking realization that life had changed, and that a new life was opening up.

**The shepherds, too, were surprised by joy,** to find themselves chosen to witness the birth of a very special baby. Out of all the people in Bethlehem, the lowly shepherds won the lottery.

**Sometimes happiness happens unexpectedly to us.** when we go to the dentist, expecting to need a filling and escape with a clean bill of health. Or a particular stressful situation resolves itself, despite your worst fears.. and anxiety is replaced by your very own happy dance.

**But joy is more than a reaction, it is a state of mind, a state of the heart... and according to Henri Nouwen, it is a choice.**

Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose Joy and keep choosing it every day.

**We have to choose Joy...** We have to actively seek it, and make it a priority in our lives. Remember last week... top of to do list. Peace find some.  
Now add. Joy, experience some!

Sometimes in our lives, it's only when we are recovering from a very dark place, that we truly appreciate the light. It's only when we have come from despair, that we can truly appreciate joy. A bit like the weather. It's only after a snowstorm that you truly appreciate a sunny day.

And the good news is, that if joy is a choice, I can choose joy any time I want. I don't have to wait for it to arrive in the mail, or until someone gives me joy, or have to find joy somewhere out there in the big wide world. No. Joy is freely available right now. Right here and right now.

You want hope? Check. You have it.

You want peace? Check. It's yours.

You want joy? Are you ready for this....

You want love? Love is on the way. Check check and double check. That's what each of us signed up for when we chose to become followers of Christ. We chose positive versus negative emotions. We turned away from anguish, despair, loneliness, feelings of insecurity and unworthiness. We chose light and sunshine instead of darkness. We chose hope, peace, joy and love.

Isaiah 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

**Happiness and joy... window analogy.** Happiness is a window with the sun shining through. Joy is a stained glass window with a whole rainbow of colors glowing and dancing together.

**Which brings me to the dance of joy....** the Holy Trinity, the idea that the three separate facets of God, the Father, the Son, and the holy Spirit, combine together in a dance of joy, celebrating each other, and enervating each other. Joy is a dynamic. It's a relationship, that lights up your life. It's knowing you are loved, and are precious. It's believing that we are all in need of help. There is not a single perfect person amongst

us. God knows us inside out, and he still loves us. As the Father, as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

*Philippians 4:8-9 NIV Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

**God is our hope.** God is our refuge. God is our going out and our coming in. God is in the drivers seat. That leads to a sense of profound **peace in your heart**, because you realize that everything is going to be all right. Everything is going to sort itself out. You can relax.

*Matthew 11:28-29 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. That leads to JOY* because you realize that the life you have been given is an incredible blessing. You look around you, at your children and grandchildren, at the experiences you have lived through, the challenges you have been helped through, the good times you have been given, and realize that God really really loves YOU! It's a miracle!!

### **Rejoice, and be joyful!!**

Philippians is Paul's joy letter. 16 times rejoicing or joy in 4 chapters. Rejoice in the Lord always. I say again, rejoice!

God gave you every single member of your family. He gave you every single friend you have. He gave you some people labelled 'extra grace required' but he entrusted them to you. Remember the Prodigal Son, where the Son is fearful to return home, because he fears he has lost everything, including the love of his father, and his father ran to meet him, throwing caution and custom out of the window. That is love... and that is the subject of next week. Stay tuned. The grand finale. All you need is love.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the opportunity day after day to step out of darkness and into light. Illuminate us, like stained glass windows, so that your glory can shine through us and out into the world. Light us up with your joy, and let us see the world afresh with new eyes, eyes of faith that see only potential, hearts that are open to the promptings of your Holy Spirit, and a beautiful world that sings your praise right under our very noses... Amen.