

Open Table Community Church
Advent Devotional
2019



Week 3: Joy

Introduction

Each week of Advent has a theme. Week one is HOPE. Week two is PEACE. Week three is JOY. Week four is LOVE. In this Devotional, you will be offered 1-4 scripture readings if you wish to read the lectionary passages for this year. There will also be a short devotional reading followed by a meditation for the week. As we use Advent as a contemplative discipline to quiet our hearts and wait for the arrival of Jesus, I suggest using the meditations to aid you. Whenever you get caught up in the crazy pace of the holiday season, return to the meditations to resist being swept up in the chaos.

After the meditations, there will be a devotional for the whole family, especially the kiddos. It will include a review of what the kids are learning in The Kids' Table so you can refresh your kids on the content from Sunday. It will also come with challenges you can complete with your children during the Advent season.

We pray that this Devotional will help your family to slow down this season and prepare yourselves for God's Big Gift, the Advent of Jesus.

Scripture Reading

Psalms 146:5-10

Isaiah 35:1-10

Devotional Reading

Often times, we, as adults, envy children for their innate capacity to experience JOY. In fact, many of us can remember freely accepting JOY when we were kids. But then life set in. We grow older and more self-conscious. We take on more responsibility. We grow up. And when we do, we often times leave JOY, deep JOY, in our past. We have fun. We celebrate when good things happen, but we rarely feel that, "I'm going to express happiness like everything in the world is right and always will be", kind of JOY. That's reserved for children. But what if the kids have it right?

Kids have the benefit of adults. They have someone who takes care of all of their needs. They don't have to provide. They don't have to figure everything out. They don't have to truly clean up their messes. They don't have the whole weight of the world on their shoulders. They don't know what it's like to have the entire universe depending on them. That's reserved for adults. Or is it?

One of the metaphors the Bible continually uses for the relationship between God and His people is that of parent and child. Most of us who are parents didn't form our children from dust and then breathe into them our Spirit to bring them to life so calling God "Father" is really only metaphorical. But as we discuss JOY, maybe the parent/child metaphor is perfect. Maybe we as humans are ultimately more childlike than we realize? Maybe someone else is taking care of our needs? Maybe we aren't the ones who provide? Maybe we don't have to figure everything out? Maybe we aren't the ones who really clean up our messes? Maybe the whole weight of the world isn't on our shoulders? Maybe the entire universe isn't depending on us? Maybe all of that stuff is reserved for God?

One of my favorite things about having toddlers is when they try to act like adults. Asher's current fascination is with helping to do the dishes. He has a stool that he can push up to the sink so he can stand next to you as you work. He says over and over, as he takes the clean dishes from the strainer and throws them back in the soapy water, "I'm helping dishes". He absolutely loves doing it and is heartbroken if you tell him he can't. I wonder if the things that we take so seriously, look to God like us "helping dishes". I wonder if maybe we aren't playing God the way Asher plays grown-up.

I think sometimes JOY comes when we stop taking ourselves so seriously and that only happens when we truly take God seriously. As we allow God to be God, we realize that we can dance. We can play. We can be goofy. We can know JOY.

This Week's Meditation

Imagine how you might express Joy if you weren't self conscious.

If you expressed Joy that way, how do you think it would affect your life?

From The Kid's Table

This year for Advent, The Kids' Table is going to lean into the concept of SHINE-ing hope, peace, joy, and love to the world we live in. We would love for you to join us. Our hope is that this year, we will all interact with this grand story of God's Big Gift to mankind, **JESUS**, and in that process that we will all find ourselves in the story of God.

Each week we will tell a part of the story leading up to Jesus, and we will focus on one of the 4 ways we want to SHINE this Advent season. Your children will be bringing home "ornaments" that they can make at home to help them retell the story with you. You can choose to do this however you want, one each day, all together on one day, or any other way you can dream up that best fits your family and life. The important thing is not how or when you do this, but that you are exploring together ways to SHINE.

We pray that this year as you read and interact with God, your family, and the people you meet each day that you are able to embrace the fact that you are relentlessly pursued by a God who gave up everything to come and find you. What a gift that we can share with ourselves and our families! Let's SHINE together OTCC!

Week Three

This week in The Kids' Table we covered these stories:

- **Elijah**
- **Jonah**
- **Isaiah**
- **Daniel**
- **John the Baptist**
- **Mary**
- **Joseph**

Allow your child/ren to tell as much or as little of the story as they remember. Help them to recognize and learn that each of our voices are important in our church.

Elijah-

A long time after King David and King Solomon there was another king named Ahab. Ahab was not a very good king. So, God sent another great prophet like Samuel had been to talk to the Israelites. This prophet's name was Elijah. God used Elijah to do many miracles. One of those miracles happened on a mountain called Mount Carmel. The Israelites were in the middle of a time where there had not been rain for a long time and so they didn't have enough food for everyone to eat. Ahab didn't even worship God. He had decided to worship a false god who wasn't real called Baal. Elijah challenged the prophets who worked for King Ahab to see which God was more powerful. The people of Israel came. The king and queen came, their prophets came. They built 2 stone altars. They put wood on both altars and then killed cows that they were going to sacrifice. The crazy thing was that they were going to see which god would send fire to burn up the sacrifice first. The prophets for the king and queen's god, Baal went first. They prayed all morning long and even cut themselves while dancing around the altar asking Baal to send fire to burn their sacrifice. Nothing worked. No fire. Then came Elijah. He poured water all over the altar to God to make it harder for it to catch fire. Elijah prayed to God and asked him to accept his sacrifice. Fire came from heaven immediately and burned up the cow, the wood and the stone altar. Elijah showed the Israelites that God was real, but the problem was it made the queen really angry. From then on, she wanted Elijah dead. Until the day she died, Elijah had to spend all his time running from the queen. Sometimes it made him really scared, but most of the time Elijah spent his time telling the Israelites that God loved them and wanted them to follow Him so they could experience the joy God wanted them to be able to have.

Jonah-

Jonah was a prophet who became famous because he didn't obey God. God told Jonah to go to the city of the Israelite's enemies, Nineveh, and tell them they needed to stop doing bad things and follow God. Jonah really didn't want to do that because he knew that God would forgive the people of Nineveh and Jonah really wanted God to be angry with the people. So he got on a boat to go to an entirely different place. God sent a huge storm, and finally Jonah told the sailors on the boat to throw him overboard so that their ship wouldn't sink. When they threw him out of the boat, the water became calm. But, God didn't want Jonah to die so he sent a great big fish to swallow Jonah. While Jonah was hanging out in the fish's belly he spent a lot of time praying and talking to God. After 3 days the fish threw Jonah up on the shore, and Jonah went to Nineveh to tell the people that God loved them and wanted them to stop doing bad things. The people believed Jonah and obeyed God. Jonah was kind of upset because he still didn't like the people of Nineveh, but God spoke to Jonah that He loved all men and wanted all of them to know the joy that the love of God brings.

Isaiah-

Isaiah was a really cool prophet who lived at a time when everything around him seemed to be falling apart. All of Israel had been conquered by other countries and many of the buildings were

falling down. The people were sad because everything they loved about their country had been destroyed. But Isaiah saw something more. He knew God had a plan for Israel and the Israelites and even though everything around them looked bad someday God would make everything better and just like God had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob one day he would use their nation to bless all humans. He was able to look into the future and experience joy that one day God would make everything good again like it had been when God put Adam and Eve in the perfect garden.

Daniel-

Daniel was a young boy when he was taken captive by an army and taken to live in a completely different land to serve a king far away from his family and his home. He was given new clothes, learned new customs and new laws, and was even given a whole new name. But Daniel never forgot what he learned when he was very young that God loved him and that he was supposed to talk to God every single day. Daniel did well in everything the king asked him to do and soon he was one of the king's advisors. Some of the king's other advisors got super jealous of him so they made a plan to get rid of Daniel. They had the king make a rule that no one could pray to anyone other than the king for 30 days. Daniel knew he could not obey that rule, and he kept praying and talking to God every single day. The king's advisors caught Daniel and took him to the king. The king loved Daniel and was very sad, but he had signed a law that said that anyone who disobeyed and prayed to anyone other than him for those 30 days would be thrown in a pit full of lions. Daniel was thrown in with the lions, but in the morning when the king came back to check on Daniel he was fine. God had protected Daniel and saved him from being eaten by the lions. Daniel told the king just why he had not been scared of the lions, and had chosen to keep praying to God instead of praying to the king. He was able to tell the king about the joy he knew and the God of the Israelites who loves all men and wants them to love Him.

John the Baptist-

John the Baptist came a long time after Adam and Eve and Noah and Abraham and Moses and David and Elijah and Daniel. He was pretty special because God chose him to tell everyone that Jesus was getting ready to come. John spent his whole life telling huge crowds of people that Jesus was coming and that He would be so much greater than John was. John's parents were named Zacharias and Elisabeth and they were really old, almost as old as Abraham and his wife, Sarah had been when they had their son, Isaac. An angel came to them and told them they would have a son and he would announce the coming of God's Biggest Gift, the thing God had been promising since Adam and Eve sinned and since He had promised Abraham that one day He would use Abraham's family to bless all of creation.

Mary-

Mary was Jesus' mom. She held him and loved him and fed him. She changed his diapers and cheered as he learned to walk and talk. She worried as he grew older and was away from home. She loved him just like your momma loves you. Just like an angel had come to tell

Zacharias that he and Elisabeth would have a baby, an angel came to Mary and told her that she was going to have a baby, and that baby would be the son of God. He was going to change everything! Mary was only a young teenage girl, and she was supposed to be getting married to a man named Joseph soon, but she joyfully accepted the angel's news and said, "Let it be done." Mary knew that God had chosen her for something special and she was overjoyed at the thought of helping God make all things good again.

Joseph-

Joseph was the man who married Jesus' mom, Mary. He was Jesus' dad here on earth. He taught Jesus to be a carpenter, and he probably held him as a baby and played games with him as a young boy. He taught him to pray and to sing. He taught him to be a great big brother to his younger brothers and sisters. He loved Jesus. But, when he first heard Mary was going to have a baby, he was afraid to marry her. An angel came to him and told him that God had chosen him to be Jesus' dad. God had given him the job of helping to raise him to become the gift that God was giving to all of creation. God was going to use Joseph to help bring all of mankind great joy!

This week we're looking for ways we can find and SHINE joy. Because joy can be a complex subject to talk with kids about, it can be easier to us examples rather than just trying to define it using words. Start by having them talk about the things that make them happy, and then the things that bring them deep pleasure. It's easy to talk with them about favorite toys and movies or games, and contrast them with things that bring deep pleasure like parents, friends and maybe a special animal can help them to understand that sometimes joy comes with both happiness and sadness. Just as we have talked about the fact that we can spread hope and peace to the world around us we can use the stories we read this week to help us find ways to spread joy in our everyday life together.

Joy becomes evident in Elijah's story when we start to see and experience God's faithfulness to him even as he battled depression, ran for his life, and lived with a widow and her son. God was for Elijah always. He cared for him, even sending birds to bring him food each and every day at one point. That same God is on our side.

Joy shows up in the story of Isaiah as we see his ability to look under the surface of the crumbling buildings and walls of Jerusalem to see the city that all of mankind will look to as the place of peace. God, grant us eyes to look under the surface.

In Daniel's story, we see the unshakeable faith of a man who knew that God would care for him, even if it meant he would be thrown in a pit of lions to be eaten. How Daniel's fear of being eaten by a bunch of hungry lions must have turned to joy as he spent an entire night with the lions and then the dawning realization that God was protecting him from being eaten. We serve this same God.

John the Baptist knew in his mother's womb that his entire job was to point the way to Jesus. The story would never be about him, and yet he faithfully proclaimed Jesus' coming and even protested baptizing Jesus. He was able to direct others to follow Jesus only because he knew from his earliest days that God had called him to point others to the gift of Jesus. The deep joy he must have experienced served him well all the way to the end of his life. Whatever road we are walking we can still experience the joy of knowing God and His love for us.

Joseph and Mary went into the job of parenting Jesus with their eyes fully open. The angels told them the road ahead would be hard, and yet they accepted the job. They took the deep, abiding pleasure of knowing they had helped to bring God's love into this world as a gift and carried it well. Parenting can be the hardest, most joy filled journey we experience as humans. God walks that road with us.

This world is screaming for joy. We try to create it by filling our lives with busyness and stuff, but experiences and possessions can never truly replace the joy that comes from being a part of bringing God's love to another human being. Let's SHINE joy this week!

Challenge:

- This week, organize a "stocking stuffing" event in your home. Encourage each member of your family to write an encouraging note and then "stuff" the notes into the bottom of each of your family's stockings. Assist your younger children in writing notes, or in drawing pictures for each of the members of your family. Build the excitement that each of you will have wonderful little gifts from each person in your family to enjoy soon. Then, when you open your stockings together at Christmas, pause together to relish the joy that comes from giving joy to others.
- Be imaginative, and actively try to create joy in the everyday things you do and see. Create a list together that celebrates the finding of joy in your lives.
- Take a drive as a family to look at Christmas lights. Experience together how beautiful the lights are, how fun it is to listen to and sing Christmas music together, enjoy together the wonder of Christmas and talk about the fact that when we find ways to spread Hope, Peace, and Joy we are like the Christmas lights and decorations lighting the way to Jesus and bringing excitement into the lives of other people as they get to experience God's love for them. Here are just a few websites if you need some help finding some incredible light displays. <http://www.kansastravel.org/kansascitychristmasdisplays.htm> [https://www.pleasantridge.com/pleasant-ridge-memory-lane-christmas-light-celebration.h](https://www.pleasantridge.com/pleasant-ridge-memory-lane-christmas-light-celebration.htm)
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