



Advent No. 3 - Joy December 12, 2021

Here's a beautiful poem of Joy from our Zephaniah scripture today:

Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."

It is very similar to the Accent Songs presented in the Psalms, like this one in Psalm 126: When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

Today is the third Sunday of Advent--the theme is joy. Many of us lose our joy at the Christmas season because Christmas doesn't always live up to the expectations we have of it. We place unreasonable demands on it and upon ourselves.

We want to be upbeat and happy every minute and the family must get together with no unpleasantness and disagreements. No one will argue and every present will be well received. We look forward to an ideal joyful Christmas.

We all have some kind of plans for the holidays. Some will travel "back home" to see relatives and others will welcome family and friends "home for the holidays." But have you ever gone home only to have that much-anticipated time somehow fall flat? I mean... if your family is like mine, sometimes someone will end up saying the wrong thing after a rum punch or two.....

Or have you ever had your eagerly-awaited company end up driving you crazy? Homecomings are not always all they are supposed to be and some of us inevitably end up losing our joy.

Psalms 126 is called a song of ascents. As pilgrims would “ascend” the rising road to Jerusalem, they would sing some of the Psalms. This one is full of nostalgia of the memory of when God brought the exiles back home in 538 B. C. The day of homecoming was wonderful and the trip back was anticipated with great joy; and when they finally arrived, they felt that it was too good to be true.

The people knew about the promises of restoration; but when the actual moment came, it was an overwhelming experience. The Psalm opens by saying, “When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed and our mouths were filled with laughter.” They were excited about what the Lord had done for them, and they were joyful praising the Lord as they looked around.

Maybe they thought they would never get back to their home. It was almost too good to be true. When they first got home, they praised the Lord for the great miracle He had done for them and their joy spilled over to everyone around them. Others noticed what great things the Lord had done for them also.

Zephaniah’s scripture carries the same celebration, carries the same sense of gratitude toward God, and the need for singing, levity and celebration, because God had kept promises toward them. What can we get out of these beautifully written scriptures of promise and joy?

1. Rejoicing in Partial Blessings: The people had endured great sorrow but finally God takes action for His people and brings them out of captivity and back to their homeland. The restoration was not complete yet, but that didn’t matter to them.
2. They were happy and overwhelmed by all that He had done for them up to that point. Even though the walls of the city were broken down, even though things were not “perfect,” yet they experienced a sense of great joy.

Today we are reminded that we can have joy whatever our circumstances. This is because JOY is not dependent upon circumstances like happiness is. Happiness depends on GOOD HAPPENINGS. If I get a raise, I’m happy. If the weather is good, I’m happy. If I get my car fixed and it didn’t cost me very much, I’m happy. If my health is good, I’m happy. But circumstances have a tendency to change like they did for these people of God, and when that happens, happiness is lost.

Joy on the other hand defies circumstances. You can have joy in spite of difficult circumstances because joy is an attitude. Someone once said, “Joy is the feeling of grinning inside.” Who here is grinning inside this morning?

Someone once said that joy is that “deep settled confidence that God is in control of every area of your life.” How can this be? It is because God is the SOURCE of our joy. He told his disciples, “In this life you will have trouble—but take heart! I have overcome the world! Some Christians are devastated when hard times come.

Our joy is a spiritual reality anchored in God, not in external circumstances. That’s why we can have joy even when your world is falling apart, even when our Christmas celebrations are far from what we want them to be.

We can be joyful when our restoration is far from complete. We can rejoice in Partial Blessings. God is the foundation for our joy. As long as we have God in our life, no one can rob us of the joy He provides. When we feel depressed struggling with our problems, we can turn to Him and ask for His help. He will give us what we need to have JOY IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCE.

Joy is attained when we live in Confidence For the Future: C.S. Lewis said that “one of the primary signs of FAITH is the EXPERIENCES OF JOY.” Why? Because we are not worried about the future. Sometimes We often hang on to so much excess baggage that we can’t express joy in the present or have confidence in the future.

To maintain our joy we’ve got to forget the past disappointments, resentments, bitterness, and complaining. Joy will help us to LOOK FORWARD instead of backward.

My hope for us all is that we won’t sit around waiting for our circumstances to change. Joy doesn’t depend upon our situations. Joy is a by product of a healthy relationship with God. Rev. Marilyn Murphee gives a few suggestions on ways to foster joy:

- Complete what you start
- enlarge your interests
- express gratitude to a friend
- laugh a lot
- be kind to someone
- read or listen to something inspirational every day
- focus on the positive
- extend a helping hand
- jot down five reasons to be happy
- overlook pettiness and jealousy
- look forward instead of backward
- Develop a closer relationship with God

We need the joy of the Lord in our life not only during the Advent Season but throughout the year. Remember to praise the Lord for PARTIAL blessings. More will come. Thank the Lord for what He IS doing for you even if it is not complete. Have faith and confidence for the future. Ask the Lord for what you need. Let His joy come to you as you let go of the baggage of the past. Don’t wait for God to do it all. Move into an attitude of joy by doing what you can do in your current circumstances. Celebrate the Season Whatever Your Circumstances. Amen...

Prayers of the People

This Advent, we hope and pray for: Joy as we journey together,
Sight for the blind and healing for the sick,
Freedom for the prisoners and good news for the poor,
Release for the oppressed with justice for all
and love for each other. And the coming of God’s topsy-turvy,
inside out, upside-down Kingdom.

We pray for our shut ins....

We pray for those in our hearts....

Lord Jesus Christ, we await your coming,
We wait filled with hope, Knowing your light will shine in the darkness. We wait anticipating your peace, Believing that one day it will fill our world. We wait embracing your love, May we reach out to share it with our neighbours.
We wait with joy, Bubbling us in expectation of your birth.
Lord we wait, Come soon and fill us with your life. Amen.