



JOY

ADVENT | Week 3

What the world needs is joy. At some level, we all know that, but really internalizing that truth changes the way we see the world around us and the people living in it. Ultimately, just about every activity we pursue and every relationship we nurture is in the pursuit of joy. We want to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. And yet, we never seem to succeed. It's just not enough.

But we are a species that was created intentionally by a loving God to resemble and reflect Him in this broken world. This Creator God is a God of joy because He lacks nothing. That's instructive. The sovereign God of the cosmos is full of joy—and His great desire for every human heart is that they experience joy as well. What if we really lacked for...nothing?

Joy is the outcome of fulfillment.

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11, ESV). God the Father sent the Son so that the redeemed would actually “enjoy this life with Jesus’ enjoying.” He wants His joy to be our joy. What God has is enough; He is fulfilled. What He has given us is enough, even in the midst of a corrupt context. We are fulfilled, and the free gift of grace is not merely everlasting life, but never-ending joy!

It's like the great old hymn, *Joy to The World* by Isaac Watts reminds us:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,	Far as the curse is found
Nor thorns infest the ground;	Far as the curse is found
He comes to make His blessings flow	Far as, far as, the curse is found.

The ground we walk on has been cursed because of sin. But the King of glory has reversed the curse and made joy available to all mankind. May we all experience and appreciate true and lasting fulfillment this Advent season. Joy to the world!

Searching for Joy

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Luke 3:1-6 (ESV)

Joy doesn't always jump out at us. Sometimes, we have to search a little to find it. That's true in Scripture and true in our lives as well. Today's passage is one of those "treasure hunts," where digging into the people, places, and times will help us experience the delight the Lord desires for us.

First, let's look at the list of royalty and rulers in verses 1-2: the emperor of Rome, Judea's governor, three sons of a king serving as regional tetrarchs, and the high priest of the Jews. These men—Tiberius, Pilate, Herod, Philip, Lysanias, Annas, and Caiaphas—made the ancient world go round. And thanks to the record of history and Scripture, their names are probably familiar to you.

We know them because of their deeds. These secular and spiritual leaders were at best selfish, manipulative, and deceitful; at worst, many were murderers (Matt. 14:1-12, 26:34; Luke 23:1). Their most wicked works were yet to be carried out, but still reveal the hearts of these leaders and the bleak state of the world at the time of Jesus' birth.

We also know them because of the way God would use many of them to accomplish His perfect plan of redemption through His only Son's death on the cross.

It was into this dark time that "the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (v. 2). After more than 400 years, God was breaking His silence. And His first words to mankind through this Spirit-led prophet? *Forgiveness is freely given to all who turn to the Lord.*

"After more than 400 years, God was breaking His silence."

John the Baptist, as he became known, was the first prophet to minister to Israel since Malachi. And like his predecessor (and every one before him!), John was calling the world to repent. But his message was specific—he preached repentance made public by water baptism. The purpose of this was to prepare the people's hearts for the coming Messiah who would one day forever wash their sin away.

Isaiah's prophecy predicted the joy that flowed from this hope:

*"It will be said on that day,
"Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the Lord; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isa. 25:9)*

John wasn't a world leader or ruling monarch, but he was doing what no one else in his day had yet done: he was preparing the way of the Lord (v. 3). And the people responded en masse. We see elsewhere in Scripture that the Jordan River

overflowed with sinners aware of their brokenness and desperate for a life released from the burden of the law (Matt. 3:5-6).

It is here among the archives of history and Old Testament prophecy that we find the spark of joy, lit by a backcountry preacher serving in obscurity on the banks of a river. The world was ruled by darkness, but this joy was rooted in the heart of a Father who knew mankind's greatest need and never once forgot His promise to His people.

Those who stepped into the waters by faith were choosing joy, trusting that there was something—and *Someone*—greater to come, and that this was only the beginning.

Joy is sometimes an act of faith for us as well. We, too, live in a dark time, and our leaders aren't often known for their benevolence or integrity. Our personal circumstances can weigh us down in grief or despair. We easily forget the Light when surrounded by all these shadows.

But unlike Israel 2,000 years ago, we know the whole story. Jesus, the Son of God, came as a baby—a herald of joy for all people. His perfect life ended on a cross, where He took on every sin and drank every drop from the cup of God's wrath. And our real life began with His resurrection. We now receive grace, righteousness, hope, and joy in abundance because of His sacrifice.

That is the daily reality for all who believe. Among many other things, we are reconciled (Rom. 5:10), at peace (Rom. 5:1) redeemed (Col. 1:14), made new (2 Cor. 5:17), chosen and blessed (Eph. 1:3-4) and perfectly loved (Eph. 2:4). Because of Christ, we have much reason to rejoice every day of our lives, no matter our circumstances.

Where will you find joy today?

Prayer

Father, thank you that joy can be my experience every day because of the gift of Your Son, Jesus. I confess it's hard to see past my circumstances or feelings, but I want to live out the joy of my salvation in all things, at all times. Help me also to be a joy giver! I want to spread Your joy to all the world, and what greater source of joy is there than being Your child, now and forever. Give me courage and opportunities to share that good news with everyone You put in my path, especially this season. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. David uses the phrase, “restore to me the joy of my salvation” in his psalm of confession and repentance (Ps. 51). In what ways has sin stolen your joy? How has the Lord been faithful to restore your joy?
2. Why is repentance of sin important for a follower of Jesus? Have you made the discipline of repentance part of your daily life? How does this affect your relationship with your heavenly Father?
3. What specific decisions can you make this time of year to help make more room for joy in your life?
4. How can you be a joy giver this Christmas season?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. What is the difference between joy and happiness?
2. What kind of things give you joy? Why?
3. Have you ever felt joy in the middle of a difficult situation? How were you able to experience joy during this time?
4. Have you ever asked God to give you more joy in Him? If not, ask Him to help you find and experience joy every day of your life!

Listen to | “*Joy to the World*”

by Isaac Watts (1719)

Joy to The world! the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing

Joy to the world! the Savior reigns
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks,
hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonder wonders of His love.

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____

