

SUNDAY December 14, 2025 "Because of Bethlehem... Worship like the Angels"

Isaiah 35:1-10 James 5:7-10 Luke 1:46-55 and Luke 2:13-15

It's the third Sunday of the season of Advent and we are preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth into human history! We have lit the pink candle to symbolize the joy that Jesus brings as his message of hope and peace begins to spread like the light of the advent wreath getting brighter each week we get closer to Christmas.

How great is your joy level in this moment? This may seem like an odd question to ask but here we are anticipating the celebration of Jesus' birth and seemingly going through the actions of what Jesus' birth means, but is there joy inside of you as you do these things?

If you have put up your Christmas tree or even a few decorations, was there joy as you placed the ornaments and turned on the lights? OR is your heart filled with memories of the past- when similar actions were done when your children or grandchildren were younger? Has the joy you once had faded, or merely changed because times have changed from where you used to be? Maybe your circumstances are different this year- anticipating either a quieter or noisier celebration because of people around you? Or even a special need to state I need the joy to come from within me because of the challenges with who you are in this moment. Maybe you are remembering loved ones who are no longer with us, or that your loved ones are not well. And just maybe you are grieving and mourning what used to be? SO how do you find the joy on this Third Sunday of Advent?

We look to the stories about new life and hope. The prophet Isaiah writes in a poetic style about hope and restoration, and offers comfort to those in exile by envisioning a future where a desolate wilderness is transformed into a lush paradise. Isaiah talks about God's healing, the end of sorrow, and a "highway of holiness" where the redeemed will return to Him singing and with everlasting joy. Included in this reading is a message to the fearful to be strong, because God will come to save them and perform miracles. This is the prophecy of Jesus, God's Son who will open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. "Be strong, do not fear.... He will come and save you". And isn't this message what we need right now in our current situations? We need the strong hope of God to overcome our fearful hearts so that one day we can experience the joy of the Lord.

Mary experienced amazing joy and trepidation at the same time. She was told by the angel Gabriel that she was going to have a baby. He will be great and called the son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary didn't hear that part much because she asked how can this be?- Gabriel explained and Mary was filled with joy as

she stated "Here am I the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

She went to see Elizabeth who was also expecting a child. AND when Elizabeth saw Mary she said that as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And then Mary breaks out in song for she comes to realize the task that is before her- to carry, bear and raise God's Son Jesus. Sure she was afraid and uncertain about what was to come. She was young and betrothed to Joseph but she knew that the baby she carried would change the world at least her world very soon.

Mary experienced joy. Often when we hear about someone expecting a baby there is joy. In our modern world it is only on occasion that mothers lose babies in child birth but children are still born. But in Mary's time it was important to bear children at a young age because women giving birth without complications was not common. SO Mary had joy.

But what about your Joy? Where is your joy today? If we listen to part of Jesus' nativity story focusing on the shepherds there is much joy contained in the hearts of the shepherds. An older hymn states, "*While by the sheep we watched at night, glad tidings brought an angel bright.*" IT was an angel who brought news to the shepherds who were out in the fields that a child was born in Bethlehem who lies in a stall. And the key part of this was the multitude of angels' message singing together *Glory to god in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!* They worshiped God as they told the good news of Jesus' birth. The angels broke out in song and praise and they moved the hearts of the shepherds to do something they would not have normally done- they left the sheep in the field.

And the words in that hymn state "*How great our Joy!*" *Joy, joy, joy! Praise we the Lord in Heaven on high!* They praised God with joy and went to Bethlehem. They went with joy filled hearts-- as they had been told of the Baby's birth by angels. They were going to see the Son Of God! They were called to be witnesses to the baby's birth and so they went just as they were-- right from the field.

I wonder what Mary thought when she saw shepherds coming to the barn? These people are not clean yet they come to see my baby? But she invited them to move closer to the One whom God had promised. They were even more joyful! They stayed there for a bit-- probably asked a few questions about who they were and the baby's birth. Then they left glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen that night.

How great is your joy in this moment! Imagine being one of those shepherds peeking in on Mary and Joseph and the baby. She invites you in-- not a normal practise at that time because she had just given birth, but they tell her what happened. They are all filled with joy-

happiness leading to tears and a leaping of faith. God's promise was fulfilled when Jesus was born.

So what are we to do on as we acknowledge the joy that Jesus brings? We need to make a big deal about the arrival of Jesus. As believers and followers of Jesus we are to give glory to God and worship like the angels. We are to sing and praise God with voices loud and strong-- Glory to God! We are to sing with John Wesley's Directions for Singing written in 1761 (found in Voices United at 720). These directions include: Learn the tunes; sing as printed. Sing all, Sing lustily with good courage- sing modestly. Sing in time and above all sing spiritually. Praise be to God. This is encouraged because if we as Christians do not tell Jesus' story or sing His praise then who will?

Our community is becoming more secular with people not knowing the meaning of Christmas being the celebration of Jesus' birth, yet able to recite the names of Santa's sleigh reindeer with no problem. WE are the ones who need to sing about the comfort and joy that Jesus brings as the child promised by the creator. WE believe so when you think about what gift to give Christ/ remember what the angels did? They praised him and filled the hearts of those who listened with joy. Jesus comes to us and we give thanks for the hope, peace and joy He brings. But the question is are you worshiping Christ like the angels? Where is your joy? Remember that JOY is Jesus Others and You and this is why we give praise to God for making all these things possible.

PRAYER

God we praise you and give thanks for the joy we receive from your Spirit and share with others because of Jesus our Saviour. As we celebrate his birth, be with us and fill our hearts with joy. Here now our prayers of hope, peace and joy SILENCE> Amen.