

## **Thankful for Joy**

Season of Thanks: Part 3 “Thankful for Joy”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 11, 2022

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

**Readings:** Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

**Reflection:** Luke 1:46b-55

**Greeting:** Go up on a high mountain, messenger Zion! Raise your voice and shout, messenger Jerusalem! Raise your voice and don't be afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” (Isaiah 40:9)

**Prayer:** In this season of Advent, we give thanks that you are with us, Lord. We come together to prepare for our Emmanuel, our God with us, that we may ready our hearts in your presence. Let us remember the words of the prophets as we prepare our hearts for hope, peace, joy, and love and help us to be thankful for the many ways you have blessed us and kept us. Strengthen us by your steadfast faithfulness that we may boldly proclaim your message of salvation. My we worship you in a spirit of truth and may we learn to love one another as we grow in our love for you, through Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.

**Reflection:** Luke 1:46b-55

*“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” (Luke 1:46b-55 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Mary from the Gospel of Luke and we hear of the joy that she finds in the Lord. Mary celebrates the God who shows mercy to his people. A God who brings down the powerful and lifts the lowly. A God who helps those in need and remembers his people. What are the things that you celebrate about God? What is it about Christ that would cause you to sing for joy? How do you spread that joy and share it with those close to you? Do you share in Mary's joy by also bringing good news the poor? Do you aim to share the joy of Christ with everyone? How can we share in the hope of Christ this Advent?

**Prayer:** O God, help us to make this Advent be a season of thanks. May you help us to prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior. May we find hope, peace, joy, and love as we share in your blessing. We ask that as we lay our joys and concerns before you that you will strengthen us by your spirit. We pray that you'll be with us in celebration and sorrow. May your love lift us up in both laughter and tears. And from the darkness may we see your great light in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Isaiah chapter 35 verses 1 through 10.

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and shouting. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp; the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35:1-10 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading for today comes from James chapter 5 verses 7 through 10.

*Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:7-10 NRSV\*)*

Our last reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 11 verses 2 through 11.

*When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to*

*them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:2-11 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

On this third Sunday of Advent, we look at being thankful for joy. I have to say, it's been an interesting week for me. My kids got sick, and it made for quite a long week. And it gave me some extra time to think about that idea of joy. And it also made me think about anticipation. And the reason it made me think of anticipation is because I've been sitting there wondering about how long we would have to wait until everyone was finally feeling better. And I had to patiently wait because the flu doesn't just magically go away. But that extra time to reflect on joy made me think about the fact that when we prepare for joy, the anticipation can build and help us to experience it more deeply. Because we know what we're looking for, and we know it when we see it. And we do see this in our readings for today.

Isaiah is anticipating the joy that will come with the glory of the Lord. One of the things that we get in the opening of Isaiah is this list of things that will bring joy to the people. Isaiah proclaims that the blind shall have their eyes opened, the ears of the deaf shall be opened, the lame shall walk, and the speechless will sing for joy. It's a list of things that will happen with the restoration that comes from God. And we see this list again when John asks his followers to go find Jesus. They ask if he is the one who is to come or if John will still need to wait. Jesus responds with a list of things that are being done. The blind are given sight, the lame walk, skin diseases are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. Jesus lists the things that we saw in Isaiah. Jesus is saying to John that if he recognizes what is being done, he'll know who he is. That he is the one who will bring that everlasting joy. When John's messengers leave, Jesus talks about John. That he was a prophet, more than a prophet even. John was the messenger sent to prepare a way. The one crying out in the wilderness calling to make straight the highway of God. We hear again about the highway from Isaiah. That it will be called the holy way and it will be for God's people. That no traveler on that road, not even a foolish one, will lose their way. Now, this is something to celebrate. Because we're reminded that God's highway is safe, and it brings joy. That the path to the Lord shuns away sorrows. We also heard it in our reflection for today. Mary sings of the joy of knowing just how good God is. And we hear of the anticipation again in James. That we have the anticipation in Isaiah of a joy that is to come. In Matthew we have the initial realization of that joy. But then we also have the anticipation of even greater joy to come, with the coming of the Lord to finish what was put into motion. That we have to be patient and strengthen our

hearts. We do that not by grumbling against each other so that we will be judged, but instead to be an example of suffering and patience. Just like the prophets, such as John. The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, the voice of one who is thrown into prison, one who died there. One who proclaimed that people should prepare because Christ is coming.

Throughout this, there's this idea that there is joy to be had and joy to be anticipated. I think that's something that we do have to think about to prepare our hearts during Advent. It's not just about experiencing joy but preparing ourselves for joy and understanding why we have that joy. And part of that for me is thinking about who Christ is to me and why he brings joy to my heart. We can answer that in so many ways. And I think part of that is because each of us is going to have our own answer. Each of us is going to have our own song that we sing. Mary's song was her own because she sang about the joy that God brought to her. I think each of us would sing our own song because each of us experiences Christ's love in a different way and it brings us different joy. And I think that is a wonderful thing. Because when we come together, and we share those joys and in turn our joy grows. It grows because we experience God through each other's joys. We understand God better because of how we see him bring joy to others. And we can experience that joy together and be thankful for that joy. I'm thankful for the joy that is to come, because it also gives us something to hope for. And the anticipation of that joy can bring us peace. Because even in the darkest times we find a light because we know that there is joy to come. We prepare for the joy, and we celebrate the joy. I think there's something truly wonderful about that. Because when we prepare for Christmas, we do all sorts of things that remind us of the joy of Christmas.

One of mine is that I like watching Christmas movies. I watch so many Christmas movies every year and I do it because it brings me joy. It also reminds me of all that Christmas means to me. Now, someone might ask how many of those movies reflect Christ in them. And I would note that a great many share the message of Christ's great love as they explore the joy that Christ brings. It is one of the things I love about this because watching all those different movies, I experience God's love in different ways. I love seeing the different ways that people can be kind to each other. The ways they can give hope to each other because of the hope they have in God. The way that people can work together for a brighter tomorrow. I love all of them. And each one helps me to prepare my heart for Christmas. Maybe it's that I watched *The Bishop's Wife* and I'm reminded that it's important to make time for the people we care about and to bring good news to the poor. Maybe I watch *Miracle on 34th Street* and I remember the way that we are called to be generous and to stand up for those in need and to seek justice. Maybe it's watching *A Christmas Carol* and remembering that it's never too late to change and that it's never too late to discover the love of Christ. And you know all of those things share the true meaning of Christmas. That it is the joy that Christ brings to each and every one of us because of the hope that it inspires in us and the peace that it brings us. Because I think there's always more for us to discover. And when we prepare our hearts to celebrate the coming of our Savior into this world, we celebrate all that he is to us. We celebrate the simple

joy of discovering the birth of a child, born to be the Prince of Peace. We celebrate a joy everlasting, a joy that is with us now. And the joy is ours to share. And it is a joy we prepare our hearts for. So let us always be thankful for the joy of Christ and let us be thankful for the joy of Christmas. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Season of Thanks**

Our current series is a look at the ways that God is a part of our lives, and all that God can do. We will spend five weeks exploring the ways that God acts. In them, we will see the ways God responds to us and how we can respond to God.

**November 27th** – *Thankful for Hope* – Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

**December 4th** – *Thankful for Peace* – Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

**December 13th** – *Thankful for Joy* – Isaiah 35:1-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

**December 18th** – *Thankful for Love* – Isaiah 7:10-16; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25

**December 24th** – *Thankful for a Child* – Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel
Ruth Ann Finley	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Kenny Holmes	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jeremy Klingler
Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood
Dean Carlen	Ross Matteson	Richard Durham	Carol Miller
Donna Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauzer	Steve Carlen
Connie Brown	Family of Leroy Kemper	Kyle Lehman	Kathy Hanks
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Nick & Leana Ochoa	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Kristen & Zach Morecraft	Greg Williams
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	

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