

The Light of Joy©

1 Chronicles 16:1-8; Isaiah 62:5; Zephaniah 3:17

December 11, 2016

Advent 3

Rev. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates

Today's Advent theme is JOY. I want us to really consider what joy means for us. How do you define Joy? Is it a state of happiness? What are some words that help you describe or define JOY?

Some synonyms I found were: *beatitude, blessedness, bliss, felicity, gladness, happiness, warm fuzzie's, elation, exhilaration, exultation, intoxication; ecstasy, euphoria, delight, enjoyment, pleasure; cheer, cheerfulness, comfort, exuberance, gladsomeness, jubilation, lightheartedness, merriness, mirth;*

So how does joy feel? Is it the excitement of Christmas morning; of opening presents? What are the presents you can think of that gave you so much joy it has lasted a lifetime?

I had great joy and excitement the year we all got ice skates for Christmas. It didn't last long though because once I got out on the ice I discovered ice skating was really, really hard (at least on a pond where waves froze in place).

When I was 14 I got my first pair of little high heels. I was excited about those too, but I can't say it brought me lasting joy. Now my joy is in not having to wear heels. I love presiding over weddings. I get the pleasure of standing right next to the groom and seeing the same vision he sees as his bride comes down the aisle. I love to see the bride, so beautiful in her white dress, glowing with love and joy.

But, oh how I love to see the groom. I always look up at his face to see in his eyes that very special look of joy and amazement. And yes, often times there is a little fear!

If you can remember when you first fell in love, the exuberant feeling of seeing your love. It didn't matter if you had been apart for a few hours or a few days, there is this joyful thrill of seeing the face of your love; of being in their presence again. Your heart is full of gladness and joy. And even if you're having a bad day, just the deep knowledge that you are loved makes it all okay.

That is the kind of passionate joy I think we can and should feel as God's children; as Jesus' followers.

So where does Joy come from? And is it possible to have joy even if we do not feel happy at the moment? Kay Warren, who is the wife of Rick Warren, the author of the book *The Purpose Driven Life* writes this in a devotional about JOY:

"Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation."

- Kay Warren

Think about that. If God is in control of all the details of our lives, if we can have assurance that that is true, then we can have confidence that everything will be all right.

Ultimately, whatever is going on with us that seems difficult or causes for anxiety, if we believe God is really in control we can trust that things will be okay.

But then there is that last part that is important to our joyfulness. We must make the intentional choice to praise God in every situation. And we can do that, if we trust that God is in control.

So, trusting and believing that God really does have us in the palm of his hand, that we can trust Him with our lives, that is great reason to allow the seeds of joy to sprout in our hearts and let them grow there, no matter what happens. But the other important element in our joy is the act of praising God.

When we think of the Christmas story and all the elements of it, there is so much joy even in the midst of confusion. Think about it. The angel comes to Mary, a young girl who is engaged to Joseph, and tells her she will be the one to give birth to the long-promised Messiah.

Mary is afraid and confused but is willing to offer herself for God's purpose. In spite of the feelings of fear, she finds great joy in being chosen by God for this amazing thing.

And remember the shepherds? Doing what shepherds do. Watching their flocks of sheep in the night. Probably a quiet, maybe cold, boring night. Don't you wonder what they were doing before the angel appeared in the night sky? Were they talking? Telling stories or maybe jokes like I imagine guys do? Were they sleeping or eating something?

Whatever it was, the angel appeared and startled them, and it changed everything that night. These men were not considered to be of any real importance. They were often looked down because of their dirty job.

But they were the first ones to hear the good news announcement that Jesus – the Son of God – Emmanuel (which means "God with us") has been born. And the angel told them where and how to find him. And extended the invitation to "come and see."

And not only did they see and hear the one angel but suddenly the sky was filled with a multitude of angels singing joyfully "Glory to God in the highest heaven! Peace on earth and good will to all people."

The angels in heaven were joyful. The Son of God was born! The shepherds were startled, in fact they were terrified. But they too were full of joy. And they got up and went to see this amazing thing that had happened.

There was so much joy in that quiet night when God came bursting into our human world in the tiny baby named Jesus.

Yesterday I had the privilege of presiding at a funeral service for Irene Koskinen, mother of Kristy Koskinen, who is here today and who we have missed since she and Debby moved to Las Vegas.

It is a joy to be able to say those words in the commendation. “All of us go down to the dust. But even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Those of us who know the salvation we have in Jesus Christ, who have experienced his amazing grace and his never ending love should know joy at all times. We can go to the funeral or the cemetery and while it is sometimes a place of grief and sadness, even there we can have joy.

Nothing should be able to ever take that joy that we have in the Lord and what he has done for us away from us. Just as Paul says in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, there is nothing that can separate us from our joy in him.

But here is one more element to joy that we must realize is true. And if we do, it should be the greatest cause of our being joyful.

Isaiah says, in chapter 62:

For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62:5

And from Zephaniah 3:17

*The Lord, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.*

When I was getting ready to present my doctoral theses in 2008, I was very nervous. I was staying in a hotel room that night and went to sleep with much anxiety. But I woke up in the night with this chorus going through my head. It was from an anthem our choir had been practicing. It went:

“I will rejoice over you. I will rejoice over you.”

I heard it over and over, like God was singing to me, calming me, holding me, assuring me. I heard it through the night and all through the morning during my presentation.

This week, I have had the church secretary back in Kansas, and the choir director and his wife searching for that anthem, looking through the old bulletins to see what the title was. It is no where to be found. There is not one song that is similar. And I found other songs to this passage but they are somewhat different.

Yet that tune and those words have stuck with all these years. God rejoices over us. God has joy in us, His children! He takes great pleasure in us. He loves us with the same great joy that we have in our children. But even more so. His joy is perfect, without any desire to make us different because we are his creation, created in His own image.

So, when we celebrate Christmas Joy, the theme for this Advent Sunday, not only do we think about our own joy, but we should find great joy in knowing that God rejoices over us.

I want you to hear this song *Our God is With us*. The tune is very similar to what I remember.

YouTube Song here <https://youtu.be/FGYLj3LluS4>

He will rejoice over you with singing.

A friend told me this about JOY and how we can have joy:

J is for Jesus. Knowing him, loving him, serving him. In our relationship with Jesus and in our salvation through him we have joy.

O is for others. Because Jesus says to love others as we love ourselves. We are to be lights that shine and reflect the light of the one who is the Light of the world – Jesus. Being there, putting others first, sharing Jesus love with others will give them and us joy.

And Y is for Yourself. All that love and goodness comes to us as we give and love and shine our lights into the dark places in our world.

May your joy be great in this season, and always, no matter what is going on in your life, or in the world. May you take comfort and have much joy in knowing that God rejoices over you with singing.

Amen.

© Copyright 2016. All Rights Reserved.