

Zeph 3:14-20, Phil 4:4-7

The Gift of Joy©  
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### The Third Sunday in Advent

Today we focus on the theme of joy. What is it that gives you great joy? How do you describe joy, anyway? We might describe joy as a feeling of delight, of happiness, of elation even. John Piper, who is a Christian Writer and theologian defines joy this way:

***Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world.***

I think, for us humans there are many things that make us happy, right? And there are things that happen that take that happiness away. Happiness is a fleeting emotion – depending on what is going on in our lives. So is happiness the same thing as joy? It can be, right?

If we are feeling really happy, we can feel a sense of joy deep inside. But, is it possible to feel joy, even if you are not feeling happy? For example, if I just learned that I had a terminal illness and nothing could be done about it, I doubt that I would be happy. That's not to say I wouldn't still have moments of happiness for whatever time I had left in this life. But at that moment, when I heard the news, I can't imagine being happy.

But could I still have joy? I believe that for me, as a Christian – one who believes that Christ Jesus is my Savior, is Emmanuel – God with us – I can have a feeling a joy that is deep down in my being. Because, I know that whatever happens to me, I belong to God, I am saved from my sins and have the promise of eternal life. Death is not the end. Because of Jesus I have reason to rejoice in the Lord always, as Paul wrote to the Philippians.

In the book *Christmas Gifts that Won't Break*, we read about three things that are gifts that can promote this Christian joy. The gift of the gift of thoughtfulness, the gift of graciousness, and the gift of encouragement,

When we show thoughtfulness toward others, really considering what they need, learning what they are going through, showing compassion and care, bringing a meal at just the right time, sending a card with a loving message – those things mean so much to people. It reflects the love of Christ from us to them and it plants joy in their hearts.

When we show the gift of graciousness – a sacrificial giving of ourselves beyond what we have to do – showing grace when someone hurts us, giving something that we have for the pleasure and happiness of someone else, sharing something we have just because of love – the gift of graciousness gives joy to the one who receives it. Jesus' showed the ultimate graciousness in his life and in his death, a pure gift of love for us.

One of the stories the author tells about the gift of encouragement is about a little boy who is going to be the angel who proclaims the good news to the shepherds in the church Christmas program. But he is very nervous because he's having a very difficult time getting his line right.

He is supposed to say: *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.* But you know, those aren't words little ones use in every day language and it was hard to remember it all.

So, the teacher spent extra time with him, trying to encourage him to not be nervous and to help him remember the line by explaining what it meant in every day terms. He was finally getting it. Here encouragement gave him the courage he needed.

But on the day of the Christmas program, he got a little nervous again as he saw all the people there watching. He had on his white robe and angel wings and halo. When it came time to say his line, he could not remember what it was. But he did remember what the message was. So, he joyfully started running around on the stage, flapping his wings and shouting:

*Oh boy! Have I got good news for you!*

Can't you imagine a modern day angel telling that to some third shift workers who are feeling alone and left out, cold and weary from their dreary jobs?

*Oh boy! Have I got good news for you!!!*

And what about people who are feeling afraid and uncertain of what's ahead in their lives?

*Oh boy! Have I got good news for you!!!*

What about people who are being laid off from their jobs? Or people who are grieving, or sick or ... what about you? What do you need to hear this Christmas?

How about remembering that God loves you so much, he sent to earth this baby whose name was to be called Emmanuel – which means God is with us. He is the one who saves us with his sacrificial gift of grace and gives us reason to rejoice in the Lord always.

How about hearing that news for yourself and your loved ones:

*Oh boy! Have I got good news for you!!!*

I don't know if that's exactly what we are going to hear from our little ones today but they are coming now to give us the good news in their own way.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice! In Emmanuel we have deep joy no matter what. In him we have really good news!

Thanks be to God!