

Advent Devotional (Week 3): Joy!



Week Three focuses on finding true joy in Christ's birth this Christmas.

by **Matt Tullos**

SCRIPTURE READING:

"In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came to her and said, 'Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.' But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. Then the angel told her: 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.'"

Luke 1:26-33

DEVOTIONAL: THE UNCONQUERABLE GIFT OF JOY

Happiness is an emotion that can disappear as quickly as it rises to the surface. Joy, however, is a choice.

We have a choice. God gives us a joy that is unconquerable. We can choose to live in an attitude of resentment, anger and fear or we can choose to pursue the joy of Christ. So what is the picture of joy in the Bible?

Joy is trusting when you want to doubt.

"Trust in the LORD forever, because in Yah, the LORD, is an everlasting rock!" (Isaiah 26:4). As Christ followers we aren't pressured to do it all for everyone. We trust in Jesus to do the heavy lifting. The key is trust. We just need to have Mary's response to the coming of Jesus, "I am the Lord's slave," said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Joy is receiving what you want to reject.

Can you imagine how the innkeeper would have felt if he said to Mary and Joseph, "Of course you can't stay in that stable! That's for paying customers. Who do you take me for?" We find joy in making room for people in need. Reflect on the mysterious words found in Hebrews: "Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

Joy is celebrating when you want to fear.

What's the first thing angels say to mortals? It's standard protocol. In just about every divine encounter the angels say: "Fear not." I can hear Jesus instruct His most trusted angels. "OK, let's go over this again ... Most of the people that I'll tell you to speak to will be scared out of their wits! So let's practice the greeting one more time." Then the angels would all say in unison, "Fear not."

APPLICATION: UNDERSTAND WHY WE CAN BE JOYFUL

The message is clear. God is not looking for ways to scare us into faith. He drew near to us to relieve the worries we have about crossing over the divide between heaven and earth.

He wants you to know that He's going to take care of you no matter what happens. One of the names that He was called long before he ever stepped on this world's stage was Immanuel meaning "God with us."

No matter what you go through we can whisper this simple truth: "Jesus is with me." Think about it. He is with you in your greatest victories and your most humiliating defeats. Jesus is with you at all times in all things.

TODAY: HOW TO CHOOSE JOY

Share: Invite each family member to share one thing that they're trusting God to handle.

Encourage: Write a note to someone who is experiencing fear and worry. Let them know you're praying that God will give them the courage they need.

Evaluate: Make an inventory of the things that bring you joy.

Express: Make the time and space to share a meal and a fun experience. This is such a busy week! Don't miss the joy of sharing the experience of Christmas with each other.

Pray:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is discord, union.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood, as to understand;

to be loved, as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

— Prayer for Peace of St. Francis of Assisi

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