

12.11.22 – Advent 3 - JOY
“Preparing Our Hearts for Joy!”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 146:5-10 (GNT) ~ Pam

⁵ Happy are those who have the God of Jacob to help them
and who depend on the Lord their God,
⁶ the Creator of heaven, earth, and sea,
and all that is in them.
He always keeps his promises;
⁷ he judges in favor of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free
⁸ and gives sight to the blind.
He lifts those who have fallen;
he loves his righteous people.
⁹ He protects the strangers who live in our land;
he helps widows and orphans,
but takes the wicked to their ruin.
¹⁰ The Lord is king forever.
Your God, O Zion, will reign for all time.

Praise the Lord!

L: These are Words of David Praising the Lord in Joy! All: Thanks be to God!

Luke 1:46-55 (NKJV)

The Song of Mary

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His name.

⁵⁰ And His mercy is on those who fear Him
From generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
And exalted the lowly.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich He has sent away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel,
 In remembrance of His mercy,
⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers,
 To Abraham and to his seed forever.”

Leader: These are Words of Holy Joy from Mary. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord and Savior, as we come to the Advent week of Joy, let us find the joy in you and in our lives because of you. We echo Mary’s words this season: “My soul magnifies the Lord,⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” Let us focus on those reasons we celebrate your coming to earth; and help us to appreciate the gifts, decorations, and glorious music too. Even if we are not yet feeling the delight of the season, please help us to hear your message of joy within our hearts over the next two weeks and beyond. Be with those who cannot be here and speak now through the Scriptures and this messenger’s voice. Amen.

Merry Christmas! Are you feeling it now? Thank you to those who were able to come to the Sopranessence concert yesterday. The singers had a joyful repertoire of Carols, popular, and sacred music that helped us get into the spirit even more! They’ll be back April 22, so perhaps you’ll join us then.

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent – Joy. We are still in the period of preparation and watchfulness for the Messiah’s birth. Yesterday’s concert reminded me how children view the holidays with exuberance and how important it is to expose them to the arts, faith, and other ways of living than just video games. Afterward, one parent shared with me that when Adrienne was singing about peace from the Messiah, her two children suddenly calmed down and relaxed into the message inspired by Scripture and Handel’s music. She said she could feel herself relaxing into the peace of the Holy Spirit as well. This sanctuary provided a family who came from Baltimore a few moments of joy and peace. That is a fulfillment of our mission center to be that sacred space for others! And that should give us joy to fulfill a part of God’s vision here.

We began our readings with the psalmist praising God for creating the heavens and the earth, demonstrating not just his power but that he is the most faithful Lord. He helps the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, frees the prisoners, raises up the defeated, gives sight to the blind, and loves the righteous. The Lord reigns forever as the eternal sovereign, gracious and just. Our joy depends on how we perceive and believe in Him. The God of Jacob in the text is usually associated with helps and protection. Rather than just look to the past great works of God, the psalmist leans into his future reign of eternity, as should we.

Although we have taught that eternal quality of life can be found right here, right now on earth (through our actions that produce joy and satisfaction), we are also called to look forward to the indescribable hope, peace, joy, and love that will be ours in the Lord's presence when we meet Him. We cannot rely only on the joys that life experiences bring, especially at Christmas; many suffer a blue holiday depending on their circumstances, so they must rely on God's eternal joy to come. This passage is a reminder from last week's message that there may be occasions of peace around us, but the spiritual peace within, *shalom*, comes from our relationship with God. So too with joy! No matter our external joys, the ultimate joy comes from our relationship with Jesus.

Mary knew this firsthand! She was living her own normal life, doing good for others, and loving her family when she was visited by an angel of God with such incredible news! After a short time to adjust, we hear her prayer of surrender to this joy she decides to accept. After a long journey from Nazareth to visit family, she and her cousin Elizabeth greet each other. During her journey, she had prayed, pondered, and met the

angel, Gabriel. That contemplative time on the journey was fruitful, and by the time she saw Elizabeth, she was excited to share her good news! Both Mary and Elizabeth were pregnant with babies who would fulfill Zechariah's prophecy in later verses 67-79. Zechariah and Elizabeth were barren and aging even though they were the most pious Jews, so a child was probably out of the question. But ... for ... God! He blessed them with John the Baptist about the same time Mary would have the baby Jesus. They could be companions during these miracles! Mary was a virgin (she "had not known a man") yet becomes a mother to the Messiah!

I find it interesting that Luke, the physician and historian, pays close attention to these details to chronicle the story of the Messiah's birth; yet as a disciple, he notes the unexplainable and shows his willingness to accept miracles! And he writes the poetry of Mary's song (much like the Old Testament Hannah's prayer to commit Samuel to the Lord's work – 1 Sam 2:1-10). Mary's words, like the psalmists, reflect God's glory and the work Jesus will do in the world. They warn lovingly of how both have and will upset the status quo. More could be said about that from a justice point of view, but today is about joy! She takes great comfort in God's work in the lives of her ancestors like Abraham, Jacob, and David. So let us revel in her words of joy! She sees purpose in her life now as a humble servant and mother to the Messiah. We know from 20/20 hindsight that she fulfilled her motherhood well and that she grieved terribly with the disciples at the cross as her son died for the sins of the whole world. Joy led to grief that led to joy again in the resurrection though! Can we remember that possibility in our own lives?

What joy are you trying to claim this season? Is it physical, emotional, mental, financial, or spiritual joy? I hope it is **transformational joy!** Sometimes we must empty our minds and hearts of worry, anxiety, or cynicism before we can experience **God's** joy. Is that you? Or you may already be happy and feeling the joys of Christmas carols, cards, and house decorations both inside and out. I ask you all though to do as Mary did on her journey – take time to pray, ponder, and reflect on your lives and your joy (or lack thereof if that is the case). All feelings are valid. Are we prepared to accept the joy of the baby Jesus? Do we get annoyed at the energy and fidgeting of children or are we overjoyed by their excitement? Can you embrace the joy and delight of the season, or are you on your knees before God confessing and emptying the distractions, so often self-imposed?

The joy we speak of today comes from your relationship with Jesus, weak or strong, and it is **only through him** that we find **transformational joy.** Do you smile on the inside and outside when there are crowds? Are you sharing your joy with others this holiday now that we can be out and about? Can we be a living example to others of Christ's joyfulness? I hope we are, yet I know it's not always easy when there is real pain, a tri-demic, inflation, death, war. So, I suggest this.

Will you continue or begin this process of emptying this week? We only have two weeks to process and let go of stuff, internal or external. How are you doing in these areas? What do you need to do or let go of to accept and share JOY in your life and community? Name it. Then let it go. Leave it at this altar for God's healing and renewal or come talk to

me. You will find Christ's Joy if you prepare your heart to receive it.
Then we'll come together in LOVE next Sunday. Keep watch! Amen! //
Will you pray with me? God of joy and delight, thank you for these
words to remind us that *Emmanuel* is why we are here today. May our
internal spiritual joy grow and show to the world your love for us. Help
us to consciously empty our minds of distraction so we may watch and
wait for the Christ child to be born. Bring transformational JOY to our
lives, our church, and the world. Thank you, oh Lord, for Mary's song
and sacrifice, as we humbly ask these things in Jesus' name, **Amen.**