

## **Home Church Package – Sunday Dec 13, 2020 – Advent 3**

Materials prepared/curated by Rev. Jenn Swanson  
“I Believe in God: Ode to Joy” from the Worship Design Studio Series

This Advent we lift up the power of music to light up the night even when we cannot sing together in person. And we raise up the strength of believing and trusting God’s promises even when we cannot yet see them lived out.

Hope, Love, Joy, and Peace are the familiar themes of Advent that will ground us each week as we gather around Scripture stories that centre us in the wonder of God coming to us in Jesus.

We continue our Advent journey with the call to be awake, alert, aware, and readying ourselves to behold the new life into which God is leading us.

### **Crossing the Threshold**

This week, we turn to Luke’s writing, which is an account in two acts: the Gospel biography of Jesus and then the story of the early church – the “Jesus community.” Whether you were a Jew or Gentile in those days, deciding to become a part of this illegal early Christian movement could bring punishment for your allegiance. Surely the message that the downcast, lowly, and oppressed would rise up is a welcome and inspirational account. Like the early Christians, we also sometimes wonder where God is in our suffering. We long to hear the promise that a reason for joyful praise is the good news on the way!

### **Opening Prayer**

(You are invited to light your third Advent wreath candle, or even just imagine one as you read the following prayer.)

Holy One,  
we thank you for the glimpses we catch  
of your gift of the depths of joy.  
Even in the midst of fear,  
of challenge, of struggle—  
even when we are not sure  
of your presence,  
ignite the flame of joy within us,  
that we might glow with its brilliance  
from the inside out. Amen.

## **Scripture: Luke 1: 1-4; 46-56 NRSV**

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Later in this chapter, we hear Mary's Magnificat :

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness 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.  
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 thoughts 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 helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

## Reflection (by Rev Jennifer)

Joy to the World! Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You! Joy Comes with the Dawn. I am bringing you good news of great joy.

So what IS Christian or biblical or spiritual joy, and how is it different?  
Let's first look at what it's not.

Joy, in the biblical sense is not the result of a particular thing happening, per se. It's also not intellectual or something you can think your way into. It's not the same thing as outer happiness or excitement.

So what is it, then? In the original Greek, the word was "*chara*", a noun that describes an inner gladness and rejoicing, a deep seated pleasure, a depth of assurance and confidence that ignites a cheerful heart. It's an inner knowing.

Advent is about preparing the way...inside...by letting go of what no longer serves us inside and by making room for spiritual growth and newness within by letting go of old injustices, tired stories...those unhelpful loops we default into and spend time and energy and emotion reliving. Advent is a time to wait internally to open up space, to allow for new awareness to emerge.

And we do that with hope...and with peace...so that we can access spiritual joy...that depth of assurance and confidence that comes from God.

The angel Gabriel had been busy. He'd visited Elizabeth and Zechariah months before, and told them they would have a child...which seemed impossible at their advanced ages, and yet there she was...expecting.

One day, her relative Mary came hurrying over to visit her and the scripture says that when Mary greeted Elizabeth...the child in Elizabeth's womb leapt and suddenly Elizabeth had a spiritual revelation - an epiphany - the text says that after Mary's greeting, "*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit...and then, unable to contain herself, she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."* And then with wonder and amazement she asked:

*"And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy."* and then Elizabeth says in realization..."*And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.*" In other words...blessed is she who believes that what God promises is true. Blessed is she who believes.

So maybe she hadn't really been sure before...but clearly she was overcome with what had just gone on inside of her...not just the baby leaping in her womb...but the shift that had just happened in her heart. Inner joy. Joy that is so much more than fleeting happiness and excitement.

The Magnificat is Mary's song of joy. Despite her struggle, despite the uncertainty and the very strange and potentially dangerous situation she found herself in...she believed "even when" as our theme this Advent says.

And so, I wonder how it is with you? Despite the strange and potentially dangerous times we find ourselves in this year, this Advent...

Where have you found a spark of joy? Has there been even a moment in your heart? Have you glimpsed that place where God's promise shines through, even when things are odd and not "normal"?

Maybe you have...or maybe just not yet. And that's perfectly okay because this is Advent after all...and our spiritual practice during this sacred season is indeed to wait...to get quiet...to listen to music, to light candles, and to find solace in that deep knowing that even when we don't feel it...God is with us and we are not ever alone. May it be so. Amen.

### Closing Prayers

God of Joy, sometimes evident, sometimes not...we come to you this day from wherever we find ourselves and in whatever state we are in..whether we are feeling positive and hopeful, resigned and staying the course, or feeling ourselves sad and in despair.

Help us to know your deep and abiding comfort this day.

Help us to feel the love and connection of those in our communities...family, friends, church and other organizations we might belong to.

Be with all those who grieve.

Be with those for whom this time of year is not easy or happy.

Be with those who suffer.

Be with all those whose names we have lifted up today...out loud or in the chat or just whispered in our hearts.

We know, Loving God that you hear us, and that you meet us in the stillness...that you are the very air we breathe.

And we continue in prayer as we offer the Peace of Christ to one another...from wherever we are and to whomever we are with either in person or virtually or spiritually...May the Peace of Christ Be With You. **And also with you.**

Let us continue with this beautiful adaptation of the Lord's Prayer that comes from the New Zealand Book of Prayer:

Eternal Spirit,

Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,

Source of all that is and that shall be,

Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,

now and forever.

Amen

### **Blessing**

Go now in hope of a newborn life.

Go now into the service of the Prince of Peace.

Go now with joy, the sign of God's presence.

Go now with a love which is gently strong

to take up the calling of Christmas, that soon begins.