

# Advent Devotions Week 3 “Joy”

Monday – Jim Pierce

*In the hopelessness of sin shadows deep had fallen.  
All the world lay under death. Eyes were closed in sleeping.  
But, when all seemed lost in night, came the sun whose golden light  
brings unending joy, brings the endless joy,  
of our hope, highest hope, of our hope's bright dawning,  
Son beloved of heaven.*

*Cold December Flies Away, verse 2, LBW 53, ELW 299*

In 1955, C. S. Lewis published *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, a spiritual autobiography in which he chronicled his journey from Atheism to Christianity. In this book he wrote of his adolescent search for joy and of events leading up to his conversion at age thirty-one. The paradox of the book's title and that adolescent quest spoke to me as I reflected on joy these past few days, guiding me to this revelation. Joy is not something we can go out and find. Joy is not something we can simply decide to have. Joyful is not something we can simply decide to be.

No, joy is always something that finds us. It pops up beside us, sneaks a hand into ours, whispers in our ear, and floods over us, surprising us because it's the one thing we were not expecting.

That surprise is the essence of the whole Christmas hymn, *Cold December Flies Away*. It is most especially proclaimed in its second verse, printed above. What could be more surprising to you, to me, locked in the hopelessness of sin, laying under the sentence of death, lost in the night, than this: to open our eyes to discover that to us, in the darkness, comes the sun whose unending light brings joy, endless joy, Son beloved of heaven!

All of our searching leads ultimately to despair. We cannot find joy; we cannot create joy; we cannot become joyful by deciding that's what we are going to be. But we can be surprised by joy. Indeed we are surprised by joy when it comes to us. Joy shows up when we least expect it, when we have given up looking for it, when we know it will never be ours. It comes, like that still, small voice of peace in the midst of the storm that whispers, "Psst. Here I am, with you."

Where, in your own life, have you been surprised by joy. What was going on at the time? What had you in its grasp? And what did that surprise of joy do to restore you, to give you hope? Have you thanked God for that surprise recently? Even if you have, do it again. You will be surprised once more as you thank God for that gift.

*God, my life's true joy, thank you for surprising me again and again when I least expect you to come to me. Amen.*

## Tuesday – Phil Hornbostel

This contemporary Lutheran hymn is the work of well-known Lutheran and United Church of Christ composer and lyricist Marty Haugen. His music is well-known throughout the American Lutheran family and this is one of his best-known achievements. Written in an exciting and expectant 6/8 meter, it literally dances from the sheet music into the halls of Advent sanctuaries throughout our ELCA. Marty grew up in the American Lutheran Church in Minnesota, and now is “composer-in-residence” for Mayflower Community Congregational Church in Minneapolis. He has a great ear for exhilarating and inspirational contemporary Christian music. Here is Marty leading and playing guitar on “Awake, Awake”, (#242 in the red hymnal):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckwlojPHqrQ>

Marty was determined to cover Messianic prophecy from Isaiah in a style and lyric that his congregations could sing out, with joy. And drawing from the familiar texts in Isaiah, chapter 7, chapter 9, and chapter 35, he lifts the best from the Old Testament pages and paints a vivid and uplifting word map. And then provides a music setting that underscores the sense of joy that can barely be contained, the excitement that children feel as they watch the days on the Advent calendar open too, too slowly, but then finally, the big day is almost here! And you can feel the exuberance that Marty felt, as he titled the music “Rejoice, Rejoice”. Indeed, as in “filled with joy!”

*Lord God, in this season of Advent, we rejoice with all your people over the great gift of grace and salvation which you have provided through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let us see the true blessing of this gift through all our sorrow and fear, and let us hear the humble song of Emanuel. Amen*

## Wednesday – Jeff Langdon

While many see the season of Advent as a lead-up to Christmas, the season is more appropriately celebrated as a time in the Church Year when we remember and reflect on the promise of Christ's return, A season of waiting. This week the candle we will light will be the pink candle...

Over the past few weeks I have written about Hope and Peace. This week we focus on the Advent theme of Joy. This verse is from one of my new favorite Advent songs- Advent Cry by Joseph Martin;

Peace will come on the wings of a promise"  
Hope will come like the morning's first call  
**Joy will come in the winds of the spirit**  
Love will come, Love will come  
Come Lord Jesus

Most of us right now are looking forward joyfully to our celebration of the birth of Jesus. We look back at that event and we rejoice at a promise fulfilled... the birth of our Savior. But in the years before the birth of Jesus, God's people waited in joyful expectation of a promise yet to come... the promise of a Savior. Their joy was not based on the knowledge of what God had done, but their joy was based on the promise of what God would do.

Joy as described in the Bible is different from what we normally consider joy. It is not just a happy emotion that we either feel or don't feel. The Bible describes joy as coming from God... a product or outcome of what God has already done and continues to do. It is gladness or contentment flowing from God's faithfulness and it is independent of our circumstances. God's people had joy because they looked forward to a time when the promised Messiah would come. The writers of books of Psalms and the Prophets reminded the people that their faith meant joy would be found in God's promise, even in the midst of great sorrow.

Today, our joy is anchored in the knowledge and faith that God fulfilled God's promise. It is easy to be full of rejoicing when we replay the words of the angels... "Today I bring to you good news that will be a great joy to all people. For to you a Savior has been born in Bethlehem, the city of David". But it is important to remember that the joy we have in Christ is not a seasonal joy or a situational joy. Like the joy of God's ancient people, our joy is a response to what God has already done and to what God continues to do.

The joy we celebrate today is an active joy. Mother Teresa is reported to have said "Joy is a net of love by which you catch souls. A joyful heart is the inevitable result of a heart burning with love". The joy we celebrate is a joy of what God is calling us to do... it is a joy that endures whether we are in the midst of a Christmas celebration with friends and family, or in the lows of post-holiday blues.

The joy we celebrate sends us out to be God's people in all we do. We are called to do joy... not to simply celebrate with joy. Note -There is a relationship between doing joy and doing mercy, doing justice and doing love. We are called to do these things. How will you do joy this season and beyond?

*Help us O Lord to be a joyful people... Help me to be a joyful person. Remind us that joy comes from you... on the winds of your Spirit. Use your Spirit to help us bring joy, be joy and do joy with those we live, love and encounter this season. Come Lord Jesus Come... make our joy complete. Amen*

## Thursday – Juel Pierce

*Fling wide the door, unbar the gate; the King of glory comes in state;  
the Lord of lords and King of kings, the Savior of the world who brings  
his great salvation to the earth. So raise a shout of holy mirth  
and praise our God and Lord, Creator, Spirit, Word.*

*He is the rock of our belief, the heart of mercy's gentle self.  
His kingly crown is holiness; his scepter is his loveliness;  
he brings our sorrows to an end. Now gladly praise our king and friend,  
and worship him with song for saving us from wrong.*

*Oh, happy towns and blessed lands that live by their true king's commands.  
And blessed be the hearts he rules, the humble places where he dwells.  
He is the rightful Son of bliss who fills our lives and makes us his,  
creator of the world, our only strength for good.*

*Come, Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ; our hearts are open wide in trust.  
Oh, show us now your lovely grace, upon our sorrows shine your face,  
and let your Holy Spirit guide our journey in your grace so wide.  
We praise your holy name, from age to age the same!*

*"Fling Wide the Door" ELW 259*

A knock at the door. We're expecting company, and we've been excited for days to think that they will be here soon. And now they're here! What do we do? Fling wide the door! Rejoice that they are here. Enjoy the praise their loveliness and be glad that they've come to our home! And before anything else, hugs all around!

That's sort of how we welcome our family when they come to our house. Maybe especially at Christmas, but really, any time they come.

This hymn (one of my very favorite Advent hymns) reminds us that's how Jesus comes to us. He's the Lord of lords, bringing salvation to the whole earth. But also he comes to me! To us! And there is no fear in his arrival. "He is the rock of our belief, the heart of mercy's gentle self" who saves us from wrong, and whose arrival reminds us that although we may have sorrows, they will not be the last word in our lives, because he makes us his.

We delight in his presence. We are truly blessed with joy because he is our God and Lord, our king and friend, Creator, Spirit, Word. And the Word he is is Joy!

May you welcome our Savior with joy into your heart and life and home and world this Advent.

## Friday – Misty Coyle

*Hearts waiting waiting on a Savior  
Come oh come Emmanuel  
Hear prophets speaking of the promise  
Come oh come Emmanuel  
A light of glory filled the sky  
And we heard the angel choir  
Joy to the world  
Joy to the world  
The Lord has come  
The Lord has come to us  
Joy to the world  
A Savior for all  
The Lord has come  
The Lord has come to us*

*Hearts Waiting (Joy To The World)*

Beth Redman | Chris Tomlin | Jonas Myrin | Matt Redman  
<https://youtu.be/AFCRxv2e8aA>

Of course, I would pick a song like this. It is a combination of an old and cherished hymn, the ever-fantastic, Handel's *Messiah*, and a new vibrant tune with new expressions to how I feel and/or want to feel today. Most of us like the feeling of joy. We long for that feeling as often as we can get it. But the joy brought to the people when Jesus was born, was a product of God and not the heart-filling emotion.

Have you ever had your heart full and prayed for something from God and God said, "no"? Do you feel joy at that time? Probably not; but, you have joy because of your filled heart could have only happened through God. When Paul wrote of joy to the Philippians while in prison. He didn't feel good to be in prison for defending the gospel. He had joy because of his heart being filled with the love and fierceness for God; knowing God was with him; and gave himself to God's plan. This is super hard for most of us. But during hard times or a crisis, has anyone asked you how you could be so calm and/or rationale? Or maybe even complimented you for being such a strong person during such a difficult situation? Your heart is full and you have joy from and through God.

So let us be joyful and "praise-crazy" this Advent season! And let us be thankful for the joy God has brought to us through a child born in a meager manger to earthly parents whose hearts were filled with joy.

*Glorious father, king of all kings, you shall reign forever and ever! Let my heart be filled with joy only you can give. Let my heart show your love to others so that they may feel joy and be filled with joy. Through your power, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!*

## Saturday – Rev. Roger Lenander

Henry Van Dyk was a professor of English literature at Princeton between 1899–1923. When he was filling in as a guest preacher at Williams College, Williamstown, MA, in 1907, he found himself overwhelmed by the beauty of the Berkshire mountain. He wrote the words that would become the hymn “Joyful, Joyful.” When he walked into the college, he handed the words to the president and said, “Here’s a hymn for you. It should be sung to Beethoven’s ‘Hymn to Joy.’”

Today it’s one of the most popular hymns of all time.

*Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,  
God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flow’rs before Thee,  
Op’ning to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;  
Drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness,  
Fill us with the light of day!*

*All Thy works with joy surround Thee,  
Earth and heav’n reflect Thy rays,  
Stars and angels sing around Thee,  
Center of unbroken praise.  
Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
Flow’ry meadow, flashing sea,  
Singing bird and flowing fountain  
Call us to rejoice in Thee.*

It is one thing to be a spectator of that which causes our heart to soar in divine joy, it is another to realize that we are part of that joy. When that happens our spirit is compelled to be swept up in the joy that God reveals in and around us. The author invites us to be a part of the chorus in this world that sings of the Joy that God has come to dwell in this world to drive away the gloom and fill it with immortal gladness.

*Dear God, I give you thanks for creating in me a new heart and a right spirit every day. Amen.*