



ADVENT THEMES

JOY

INTRODUCTION

Joy: that durable, inexhaustible, essential, inadequate word.

Christian Winan

Joy – the steadfast assurance that God is with us. Joy is profound because it surpasses the fleeting experiences of sadness and happiness. An **almost joy**, although powerful, never remains. But an **altogether joy** is virtually inexplicable. In a sense joy cannot be manufactured, sought or studied – it is a gift. It is something to do with the unexpected fulfilment of anticipation.

Luke's gospel, unlike the fast-paced gospel of Mark, is saturated with joy. When Zechariah is made silent, perhaps that is a gift rather than a curse, so he could savour the news of the unexpected gift that he will receive – he is made silent until his joy is fulfilled.

Joy is often thought to be a happy feeling, but that is not altogether so. Yes, joy can make us happy and cheerful, but this **almost joy** misses the fullness of joy experienced as a follower of Jesus.

WESLEY, JOY and SALVATION

For Wesley, salvation and joy go hand in hand – God and sinners reconciled. There is no joy for those who feel there is no forgiveness. There is no joy for those who have no assurance of salvation. Without joy there is little for which to give thanks. Knowing that one is justified by faith and freely saved by grace – that is **altogether joy**.

The Apostle Paul would say that joy is *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. (Philippians 4:7)*

Jesus in the manger is the manifestation of joy. Christian Winan says that: *joy is experiencing a flash of eternity that illuminates time.*

- What would you say is the difference between joy and happiness?

When describing what a Methodist is, Wesley says:

A Methodist is one 'who has the love of God shed abroad in his (sic) heart . . . God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul.'

- What words would you use to describe **almost joy**?
- What words would you use to describe **altogether joy**?

"Experiencing joy and experiencing God are one and the same."

"Joy is the steadfast assurance that God is with us . . . there is nothing else we need to know."

- How do these two statements ring true for the Christian?

MOVING TO AN ALTOGETHER JOY

Read Psalm 30: 1-5, 11-12

- What variations of vs. 1 do you notice in these different translations:

NRSV: *I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up.*

CEB: *I exalt you, Lord, because you pulled me up.*

NIV: *I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths.*

- In vs. 4 how does the psalmist respond to God's healing?
- What does the psalmist tell us about God in vs. 5 & 11?

LUKE'S NARRATIVE

Skim through the first two chapters of Luke and identify all the people mentioned in the story of Jesus' birth.

- How does each person/group respond to or express joy over the birth of Jesus?

In Luke's gospel, joy comes after silence, and it is experienced in the midst of persecution. This is a far cry from what we typically recognise as joy during the Advent and Christmas season. Matt Rawle

- When have you experienced joy within the silence?
- When have you experienced joy after times of trial, suffering or hardship?

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

There have been several changes to this hymn since it was first published in 1739. The first line, for example, was: *"Hark how all the welkin rings!"*

- What did John & Charles Wesley understand to be the source of our joy?
- Which lines/words illustrate the idea of altogether joy?