

LESSONS IN ADVENT



Joy in 2020

Matthew 2:10-11 (NRSV)

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Teaching

For the last week of Advent, we will focus on the joy brought by the birth of Christ and how to find joy in our own lives. Looking back at this year of 2020, it might be hard to spot moments of joy. This year brought disappointment, grief, fear, anger, and many other negative emotions. Depending on how your life has been personally, you may not see much joy at all. Today we are not going to minimize or push aside any of those experience, but what we will talk about it how the light of Christ can bring joy to the darkness of situations, even in small amounts.

Like hope and peace, joy is not something that we feel but something that we live. It is a way of being that starts and ends in God, not our decorations or presents. Joy lies in our past, present, and future relationship with God, not in our daily circumstances. Christian joy has an element of longing for what is to come. Ordinary pleasure and happiness

come with being satisfied in the moment. Joy occurs when we look forward to something—just as in Advent we look forward to Christ’s coming.

In the story of the wisemen coming to visit Jesus we see joy that is overwhelming. This joy brought by a baby named Jesus has a few important attributes to remember:

1. The Joy of Christ is gentle and humbling. The wisemen were overwhelmed with joy! They celebrated the fulfillment of scripture and the sight of the baby savior by humbling themselves before the Christ child and offering gifts. They didn’t come asking for more signs or wonders or gifts for themselves. Instead, they entered the home of Jesus who was with his mother. They knelt down in gratitude and gave him the respect that God’s son deserves. When we see the work of God come to fruition, when our hopes are fulfilled and God comes through, we are called to show our appreciation with respect, humility, and gratitude. It is with overwhelming joy that we give God what only God deserves, true praise and honor.
2. Joy comes through prayer and scripture. The wisemen had been studying and looking for signs of Jesus for years. They were in communion with God through prayer, scripture, and listening to God’s voice in their dreams and in God’s holy creation. We can rejoice in knowing that we can take anything to God in prayer. We can ask for things (supplication) and offer thanksgiving for the many gifts that we already have. Through prayer we come into a union with God that creates an intimate form of communication. Not just where we are asking God for things, but also listening and looking for God in and around us. Being in communion with God overwhelms us with joy, knowing that God loves us enough to communicate with us and guide us on the path to our Savior.
3. Joy is optimistic. Optimism is not the same thing as blind optimism. It’s important as people of faith to be honest and real about the hardships in our lives and the suffering in our world. “Choosing joy” does not mean that we ignore the problems. Instead, joy that brings optimism is the joy that bring hope. The trust that things will work out the way God intended, the commitment to fulfill our calling to be the hands and feet of Christ and we work towards God’s dreams for

the world. To live our joy, we spend our time thinking about the things of God, finding ways to bring attention to God's goodness all around us. Living out joy means being willing to see and acknowledge the best in people and situations instead of focusing on the worst. The optimism that joy brings means that we rejoice in the Lord always, whether we are still waiting for our salvation or finally found it at the end of this seasons journey.

Discussion/Reflection

- What does joy mean to you?
- Where do you see joy in the story of Jesus' birth? (Spoiler: it's everywhere!)
- How do you see the wisemen living out their joy?
- Where do you need to find joy in your life?
- In what ways does your relationship with God bring you joy?

Prayer

God, we thank you for the joy you give to the world. Help us to see it and share it as we seek to grow closer to you during this time of preparation and expectation.
Amen.

Annie Westbrook

Youth Pastor

Johns Creek Baptist Church