Christmas Playlist: Joy to the World

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, December 17th, 2022. My name is Kent Dixon and it's my joy to be the pastor here. Welcome if you're with us in person or listening on our sermon phone line or on the website or on our podcast in the days ahead.

Welcome in whatever way you're joining us today. On each Sunday of the Advent season, we'll be lighting candles to recognize one of the four virtues that Jesus brings us.
Hope, peace, joy, and love. This morning as we continue in the season of Advent, we're lighting our first candle again, which represents hope.
Our second candle, which represents peace. And we're also lighting our third candle, which symbolizes joy. And maybe you're wondering why the third candle is pink.
Well, that's because pink is the traditional liturgical color that represents joy. On this third Sunday of Advent, sometimes known as Gaudete Sunday, and it's meant to remind us of the joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus, as well as the joy that the faithful have reached the midpoint of Advent.
[1:16] We're halfway there. Today, we wish for the world to know the promise fulfilled in our King, the Prince of Peace, the Wonderful Counselor. And we declare, reflecting the words of Psalm 40, verse 5, Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done.

The things you planned for us no one can recount to you. Were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. As we reflect on the wonder of the promise of Christmas, we thank God that all of his promises to us are fulfilled in the birth, life, and death of Jesus.
And we rejoice in God's faithful love, evident in Jesus' resurrection as well, which brings us immeasurable joy. We're continuing in our Advent Sermon Series Christmas playlist this morning. And it's been a slightly unconventional Christmas series, I think you'd agree. As we're incorporating several of our favorite songs of the season, and not just any songs, but Christmas carols.
And you've likely known the first two songs we've explored so far in this series, the first Noel and Away in a Manger. And I have no doubt that this week's song is familiar to you as well, Joy to the World.
[2:35] Turn with me to the book of Psalms. Psalm 98 verse 1 to 6 says, Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Burst into jubilant song with music. Make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing.
With trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn. Shout for joy before the Lord, the King. What a wonderful psalm of praise this is. We sing the song Joy to the World, celebrating the reality that, as the song says, the Lord is come.
Because that's an important truth for us to remember that should constantly shape our lives as believers. This morning we're looking at the Bible's perspective on the concept of joy, to help us understand what leads us into the type of praise that we just heard about in Psalm 98.
[3:52] Let's jump right in. Earlier in this series, in the first week, you may remember, we talked a little bit about the difference between joy and happiness. We got a sense that happiness can be fleeting or even fickle.

But joy seems to be something the Holy Spirit puts into us in a way that we simply can't contain. It should bubble up and overflow. In fact, joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit that's described in

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Galatians 5, 22 and 23.
Joy is something that's meant to be present and even guide us through both the exciting and the difficult situations we may face in our lives. Many people would suggest that outward joy is a key marker of a true follower of Christ.
That's why it's important for us to talk about what true joy looks like today. Most importantly, why we can have it. First, joy is a powerful reminder.
Psalm 98 verse 3 says, He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. The concept of remembering is an important one that's emphasized in Scripture.
[5:07] Some of us may have good memories, and some of us may be wondering if we left the oven on. Or maybe now you are. Sorry about that.

No wonder how weak or strong our own memories are, though we serve a God who constantly remembers his promises to us. But how often do God's people forget his goodness and faithfulness in their lives?
Well, in Exodus 15, yes, Exodus in a Christmas sermon, we learn that the people of Israel have just been delivered from captivity in Egypt through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, just as God promised it would happen.
The people are clearly experiencing great joy because of their freedom. But it doesn't take very long before we start to read about their complaints, right?
Let's look at Numbers 11 verses 1 to 5. Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them, his anger was aroused.
[6:10] Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down.

So that place was called Tibera, because fire from the Lord had burned among them. The rabble with them began to crave another food, and again, the Israelites started wailing and said, If only we had meat to eat.
We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost. Also the cucumbers and melons and leeks and onions and garlic. Yuck, that sounds like the worst potluck ever.
But it does sound like a rich bounty of food. And then there's more grumbling in Numbers 21 verse 5, where we read, They spoke against God and against Moses and said, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?
There's no bread, there's no water, and we detest this miserable food. Now I know what you're thinking. How could the Israelites complain when they had just seen God provide for them by parting the Red Sea for them to escape?
[7:22] How could they not trust God after that? Well, friends, it's easy for us to say, especially when we have centuries of hindsight, to recognize what God was doing.

But I have to wonder, maybe our response wouldn't have been all that different from how the Israelites behaved if we had been in that same situation, and even with the kind of knowledge that we have.
I think sometimes all of us may tend to have a selective memory. Is that fair? For example, Michelle often tells me there's two problems that she has at times with me.
One is that I don't listen, and there was something else. But I think we may think back of our past. At times, we may remember only the lowest points.
The times where maybe the most frustrated or struggling. And remembering tough times from the past can actually add to our current frustrations or challenges. It can cause us to spiral deeper into trouble.
[8:27] When we feel frustrated and out of control, I think we may also suddenly feel we need someone to blame. And more often than not, that may tend to be God.

For the Israelites, they began to perceive their time in captivity in Egypt to have been better than their freedom following God's leading. It goes to show again that as God's people, we don't always have a very good memory.
And how easily we may forget how God has been faithful to us in the past and how He promises to be faithful in the future. But what does the Bible say about God's memory?
Well, Psalm 98 verse 3, as we heard, says, He has remembered His promise to love and be faithful to His people. That simple and amazing promise should bring us endless joy.

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God is one who freely gives good gifts to us, one of which is the gift of joy through the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Second, we have access to joy in our lives because of God's righteousness. [9:39] We don't just have access to joy because of God's promises to us, but also because of His righteousness. Psalm 98 verse 2 says, The Lord has made His salvation known and revealed His righteousness to the nations.

Someone who is described as righteous is best defined as a person who is conformed to and constantly seeking God's will. I think when we hear the word righteous, we may tend to put a self in front of there.
Self-righteous. But righteousness is best defined as we heard, a person who is conformed to and seeking God's will. And because God Himself is righteous, He serves as a model for us, teaching and serving as an example to us of what righteousness looks and sounds like, most clearly through the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.
Paul says in Romans 1 verse 17, For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.
Just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith. This verse helps us to see that we are made righteous in God's eyes when we put our faith in the work and person of Jesus Christ.
[11:06] And this is not something we do ourselves. It's the work of God in and through us by faith. So if you're like me, maybe you read the words and actions of Jesus in the gospel accounts and say to yourself, Oh, Jesus was perfect.

And I'm anything but perfect. Is there anyone who didn't have Jesus as an example? Anyone who didn't have Jesus?
Someone maybe in the Old Testament who was broken and sinful like us? Well, I'm glad you asked that. You didn't. I led you to think it.
But there is. Actually, there is. Turn with me to the story of, if you may have a guess, Job. Job 1 verse 1 says, In the land of Uz, there lived a man whose name was Job.
The man was blameless and upright. He feared God and shunned evil. So the Bible says that Job was a man who lived a blameless life. And being blameless is definitely one of the qualities of a righteous life.
[12:14] In fact, this man Job was described this way by God himself. Job 1 verse 8 says, Then the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job?

There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright. A man who fears God and shuns evil. This is certainly the kind of person I strive to be in my own life.
But as we said earlier, it can be easier to feel joyful when things are going well for us in life, can't it? But what about when our situation takes a turn for the worse?
So this is exactly what happens in the story of Job. As Satan takes most of his possessions and his family away, leaves Job with only his wife. Let's see how he responds.
If you know the story, Job's wife has had enough of all of Job's torment at this point. She's had enough. And her advice is to him, anyone remember?
[13:17] She tells her husband to curse God and die. Yikes. But we read Job's response to her in chapter 2 verse 10.

He replied, So this definitely seems to be the response of a person who is still seeking to live a righteous and blameless life, even in tough circumstances.
But that's certainly not easy, is it? We get frustrated and we lose our temper. We speak harshly or treat other people badly. We may tend to be negative or critical or prideful.
We get anxious or worried. We experience grief and loss. But the good news is that God can handle our frustrations. He can handle our bad attitudes and our pain.
And there are seasons we'll all go through that cause us grief. And even in the middle of grief and pain, we can understand that if we've placed our faith in Jesus, God has already counted us as righteous because of his Son.
[14:37] Therefore, we still have a reason to rejoice, to have joy. And maybe that's your story right now. Maybe you find yourself in a season of grief or loss.

You suddenly lost a loved one and you don't understand why God would allow you to sit in this pain. Or maybe it's another plan in your life that hasn't gone the way you'd hoped.
Your story has changed and that has caused you pain. But right there, in the middle of your pain, hear me say this. If you know Jesus, you know righteousness.

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If you know Jesus, you know hope. If you know Jesus, you know comfort. If you know Jesus, you know peace. And recognizing that, if you know Jesus, you know, my friends, the source of all true joy.
Remember Jesus and lean on his righteousness in your life. Jesus has rescued you and me from sin and death. Third, we have joy in our lives because Jesus rescued us.
[15:50] Finally today, I want us to land on this last reason why we should have joy. According to Psalm 98 and other places in the Bible, we have joy because of God's rescue mission for us.

When Jesus came to earth as a baby born in a manger, as we talked about last week, God put his rescue mission into action. Let's revisit the beginning of verse 2 in our psalm.
Psalm 98 verse 2 says, He's announced his victory. He's announced his victory.
And what is this victory? Through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ, this victory is available for all humanity over sin and death.
John 3.16 says, For God so loved the world. That's the whole world, by the way. And now because of Christ, there's a way back to intimate communion with God.
[16:57] What was broken in the Garden of Eden because of Adam and Eve's sin has now been restored through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And Paul says it another way in Romans 5 verses 17 and 18.

He says, For if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.
Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.
My friends, this is the promise of all promises. Christ has reversed the curse of sin. He's given us a better identity, and that is one of righteousness.
As the song says, The glories of his righteousness and the wonders of his love should lead us to a place of rejoicing.
[18:11] As Christmas approaches, we can know that our King has come and rescued us from the trap of sin. So we've covered a lot of ground today, from the Exodus out of Egypt, to the Psalms, to Paul in the book of Romans.

But through it all, there's one truth, one thread that remains constant, that remains the same. The righteous and faithful love of God for his people on full display.
And it's because of this truth that we rejoice today, that we can rejoice today. It's because of him that we can boldly sing, Joy to the world, the Lord is come.
It's important to remember that God's love is powerful enough for the entire world, but it's also specific enough, personal enough, direct enough, for you and for me.
Friends, God knows your every need, your silent prayers, your struggles, your hopes, and your dreams. He is the fountain of eternal and everlasting joy.
[19:28] He is a good, good Father, and he loves you. Amen.

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