

Advent Joy

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Preacher: Andy Lloyd

- [0 : 0 0] Advent joy. What a lovely thing to be able to preach on this morning in part of our four-week Advent series. If you just put the next slide up, please, Josh.
- This is the third Sunday in Advent. You'll know the third Sunday in Advent because there are three candles burning. And in some traditions it's known as Gaudete Sunday.
- And those of you who are of old enough disposition will immediately think of Steel Ice Ban. And those of you who don't, look it up.
- Gaudete in domino semper. Iterum dico, Gaudete. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice.
- From Philippians chapter 4. And Gaudete means rejoice. So it's a perfect Sunday to be preaching on Advent joy.
- [1 : 0 5] I need to tell you that were we a church where those who preach wear gowns, vestments, I would be wearing a pink gown today.
- That's the colour for joy and the colour for Gaudete Sunday. So if anything else, you have that free image. Take it home, it's an enduring image of me in a pink gown.
- But today we remember and consider the joy of the birth of Jesus Christ brings.
- The joy of that birth. Next slide please. Let's read some scripture. From Luke chapter 2. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.
- An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said, don't be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.
- [2 : 1 4] And then of course the shepherds went down to see the newborn baby Jesus. And then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they'd heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.
- The joy for all people. And I was just reflecting on it this week, in a week where there's been so many really difficult things.
- I mean, almost always there's been difficult things in the news. But this week's felt really troubled and troublesome. And for those of you who aren't Welsh, maybe some more disappointment last night.
- But, I'm not smiling. But Jesus, the birth of Jesus, the person of Jesus, causes great joy for all of us.
- And I'll come back to that in a few moments. Josh, next slide please. And then the joy of Zechariah. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.
- [3 : 4 3] When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been answered. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.

You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. Some themes emerging.

One of the themes, of course, is if angels arrive, it's not unreasonable to be terrified, but they'll say, don't be scared. So, just be aware of that.

But the theme there is joy. And let's just read one more from John chapter 15.

And this is the passage, well-known passage, about Jesus being the vine and we being the branches. I am the vine, you are the branches. You remain in me, and I in you. You will bear much fruit.

[4 : 40] Apart from me, you can do nothing. And then, as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands, and remain in his love.

I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

There's half a dozen sermons in there, in just that passage. But the joy that we get is made complete in Jesus. The joy of the Christian walk is made complete only in Jesus.

And as we accept and as we grow that joy, it becomes complete, because the joy that Jesus has is complete, and that's the joy that he gives us.

Next slide. So there are two sorts of joy. 1 Peter 1, 8 and 9, Although you've not seen him, you love him.

[5 : 53] Even though you don't see him, thou believe in him, and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you're receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

So part of the notion of joy, part of the notion of Christian joy, is this rather exuberant, bouncy sort of joy. The joy that the shepherds had. They were just, if you just put yourself in, it's really good to put yourself in their position.

They were minding their own business, looking after some sheep on a hillside, in the dark. The sheep were all gathered around them, perhaps in a pen, perhaps just around them. They maybe had a fire going to keep away the wild animals, and they were just sitting there, talking about whether they'd go to Ikea at the weekend, and things like that.

And an angel comes, and changes their life forever. Changes their life forever. And they went down, and they saw the baby Jesus, and they worshipped him, and they came back, and they were exuberant.

They were bouncy. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with bouncy Christianity. Okay? As long as it is moved by the right things. As long as it is moved by the Spirit of God.

[7 : 03] And so we see, and we hear in Scripture, and we hear contemporarily, people dancing in the Lord.

And that's fine. Part of our joy has to be exuberant. Part of our joy has to be fun. We have to enjoy the fact that we're Christians.

I have come to give you life, and life in all fullness, says Jesus. That means we should have more fun than those who don't know Jesus.

That means that we should be the ones who are attractive by our joy. And that's hard, isn't it, when there's difficult circumstances in our own lives, and lives of the folk that we love.

But part of who we are has to be joyful. And part of that joy has to be external. We have just to enjoy the fact that we are in relationship with Jesus.

[8 : 03] We've just taken the most wonderful meal, the bread and the wine, remembering the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Remembering His death and His resurrection.

Remembering that because of that act, we are going to be with Jesus forever. In heaven. Forever worshipping Him.

It's probably worth a mild hallelujah just in your heart somewhere. But it's also something that should give us a settled joy.

A bubbly joy. A dancing and singing joy. I've said already in this church, and I'll say it again, the next time I dance is when Jesus arrives. But that's okay. We don't all have to dance.

But we must be joyful. Inexpressible, indescribable joy. This is the only time in this passage in 1 Peter, the only time this word is used in the New Testament.

[9 : 01] It's a special word. It's a big word. It's a big word of worship and joy. Next slide, please. But there's a different sort of joy.

This is the passage I've already read. My joy may be in you. The joy there is chara, joy or gladness, a source of joy from the word cheer for cheerfulness.

And this is something different. There's the exuberant bouncy joy when something great has happened. But there's also what's described in one commentary I was reading this week.

Calm delight. Isn't that a lovely phrase? Calm delight. As I sit with my Lord, I have calm delight.

It doesn't make me jump up and down. It isn't exuberant. It isn't bouncy. It's just that wonderful joy that comes from knowing that I am loved by God.

[10 : 11] And that settled feeling of just, it's okay. It's okay. The storms can rage.

Difficult things can happen. Challenges will come. But in my heart, I have calm delight.

And that's just a phrase that I'm going to try to really embrace. Because it's quite easy, and I find it quite easy, to feel anything but calm delight.

Uncalmed concern. Unsettled anxiety. I can do that. But calm delight.

The only way that can happen is if we are given over through the Holy Spirit to the changing power of Almighty God.

[11 : 18] So there's something very important here as we spend time in Advent waiting for the birth, to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Jesus. And the thing that really is important here is that we allow ourselves to grow in joy.

Grow in joy. Let's have the next slide, please. So this is Thomas Aquinas. I think he's waiting for a bus or something.

He's just looking up to see. But this is the best picture I could find of Thomas Aquinas, actually. Maybe there are some better ones, but I couldn't see it. Man cannot live without joy.

Neither can women, by the way. We cannot live without joy. Therefore, when he's deprived of true spiritual joys, it's necessary that he becomes addicted to carnal pleasures.

Shall I translate that? If we are not filled with the joy of Jesus, if we don't go for our joy, if we don't go for our delight and our calm, settled joy in our relationship with Jesus, we'll look for it elsewhere.

[12 : 39] We'll look for it in the world. And the world is full of places where you can find temporary joy, temporary pleasure, temporary excitement.

Now, let me be really clear. There's nothing wrong with having fun. So this is not a sermon which says, get rid of the television, get rid of the radio, get rid of the newspapers, never go out, just spend your time being joyful.

All right? On your own, in the dark, with a candle. That's not what Jesus says. But Jesus is saying, and what Aquinas is saying here is very, very deep and very powerful.

we either get our joy from Jesus or we get it from the world. And the world will seduce us and Satan will seduce us into whatever it is that touches our particular sense of joy.

So for some, that will be one thing. For others, that will be another thing. And all of a sudden, you will find that your God is something other than Almighty God.

[14 : 07] Your God is your house. Your God is your sports team. Your God is your horse racing. Your God is your car, your garden, your clothes, your bank account.

None of those things in themselves are bad. But we get seduced so quickly by temporary joy.

and then we get into this really difficult place of having absolutely wonderful fun and then coming home and feeling empty because there's nothing there.

It's there and it's gone. So Aquinas, man cannot live without joy. We have to have joy in our lives.

We get it from God or you get it from ungodly behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Next slide, please.

[15 : 11] Matthew Henry. He's got a wig on. The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks.

They do talk funny, these folk, don't they? What on earth is Matthew Henry saying there? The joy of the Lord protects us from the temptation of the joy of the world.

But the tempter baits his hooks. That's very typical Matthew Henry sort of language. Dangles the attractive things in front of us.

And what's attractive to you is not attractive to me. But what's attractive to me is not attractive to you. This is a personal thing and we have to get that understanding right.

We have to get that sense of I know that I have to protect myself by running into the arms of Jesus. When we are coming to the point of joy, when we are talking about the joy of the Lord, the joy of the Lord is my strength, says Scripture.

[16 : 30] How do we do that? We do it deliberately. We do it intentionally. We do it daily. And we ask the Lord's help with us.

Let me move on a minute. Please. Okay. So, the joy of the Lord is a gift but it's also a fruit.

That means that God will give us some stuff but we have a responsibility too. God fills us with joy. God fills us with joy.

Romans 15 and verse 13. Somebody's moved Romans in my Bible.

It happens sometimes. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[17 : 47] The God of hope fill you with all joy. God gives us joy joy. And so we can pray.

We can sit quietly with that settled joy that calm joy and say please Lord give me more joy. Give me joy in my life.

Even when it feels a bit joyless even when it's feeling difficult we can actively pray God of hope fill me with joy. joy.

But also in Galatians 5 the list of the fruit of the Spirit joy is listed there. Joy is listed there. And the great thing about the fruit of the Spirit is that that's partly our responsibility to do something about it.

We have to grow the fruit of the Spirit. We have God to help us grow it but we have to actively seek to grow joy and love and joy and peace and all the rest of them.

[18 : 51] so we have a responsibility to take seriously our behaviour our attitudes and our thought processes and I have to do that.

I have to make sure that if I am being joyless I have to check myself and I have to come back to God and say help me grow some joy today.

Help me remind me of the really important things in my life which can mean that I can be joyful. There's a danger here of what's sometimes known as cognitive dissonance.

You just hurt your leg and you say hooray. That's not what I'm talking about. That's not the joy of the Lord. is that settled joy, that settled peace that says come what may I am safe.

Come what may I have Jesus. Come what may the joy of the Lord can and will fill my heart.

[20 : 07] ! So joy is both an extreme happiness that can't be deterred by present circumstances but also an eager anticipation of the wonderful things to come.

And it's both of those all mixed up together. It's both of those that we can together mean that we can have that settled joy in our heart.

The extreme happiness and the eager anticipation. Next slide please Josh. But joy is also an expression of our relationship with God.

John 16 I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy. I will see you again and you rejoice.

And no one can take away your joy. That's a promise from Jesus. Just allow that to sink in.

[21 : 20] Allow that to be part of what you take away today. But also Psalm 51 restore to me the joy of your salvation.

A heart cry from the psalmist restore to me the joy of your salvation. It's very easy isn't it?

I find it very easy anyway just to get on with life because it's busy and complicated sometimes scary sometimes fun and if we don't do it intentionally we forget the joy of my salvation.

Why do I go up in the morning? Why do I stay awake? Why do I go to bed at night? Why do I do stuff? For all sorts of reasons but part of my motivation has to be because God loves me.

Because I have things to do that day, people to speak to, things to share, things to do, which will make a difference in the kingdom.

[22 : 33] Why are we doing walk through Bethlehem? It's a lot of people hours is walk through Bethlehem. A lot of people who are very clever with stuff, doing all sorts of clever things which will turn this place this week into a first century marketplace.

Why are we doing it? There'll be some things that will go wrong and it'll be a pain. There's some hard work to be done. Why? Why? If we just think, well, it's a nice thing to do and some kids will come in and enjoy it, we'll fill the church, it'll be quite good fun.

Let's not bother. Let's not bother. We do it because we are called to share the good news.

So as you pray for walk through Bethlehem this week, pray that people will come to know Jesus as a result of walk through Bethlehem. Pray that somebody will come in and say, this is really weird, I don't know why I'm here, I've just found my way here, I've just almost been driven by something to come and see, and then next year we get that massive baptistry back, and we baptize some folk who for the first time this week will encounter Jesus.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, restore to me the purpose of my life, which is my service of God in joy through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 18] next slide please. And Christ's joy is different. I think that this is one of the things that to go back to that sort of calm, peaceful, settled joy.

The joy of Jesus goes far beyond momentary happiness. It isn't just a buzz or a hit, it's something that lives in us, it's something that is part of who we are.

The good news of Jesus' birth has the power to bring great joy. I say this every Christmas, I say it to myself as much as to anybody else.

Christmas gets hijacked by all sorts of stuff and frankly all sorts of nonsense. Your eternal life is not conditional on you having some homemade shibata to dip into some camembert.

but some people would suggest it is. Your eternal life is not conditional on the size and value of the presence under the tree or even the size and value of the tree itself.

[25 : 35] We've got our tree up by the way far too early but it's gone up. Looks very nice. joy of Jesus' birth needs to impact us in an astonishing deep way.

And please and I say this as much to myself as to anybody else don't allow the fun and jollification to get in the way of the truth that we are rejoicing in the birth of Jesus Christ the saviour of the world.

Our joy isn't dependent on what's going on in our life, in our world or the people that we're with. They're the temporary bits. The joy is the permanent bit.

Now there's a danger here isn't there? That doesn't mean we shouldn't be compassionate. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't be kind. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't try and go out of our way to help people. It just means that there's something underlying which is deeper, more permanent and more important than what is going on in our lives.

And then it doesn't depend on the gifts we give or the gifts we find under the tree. No earthly thing can ever complete our joy. If you are given the bestest bestest present in the whole of the world, don't compete with joy.

[27 : 12] Think of the best present you ever had. I had a bike. I think I was 11 and it was the best bike in the world. It was a big bike with big wheels. You know you have little bike and it was a big bike for big boys.

And it was the best bike and every Christmas you could always see somebody who's got a bike and they're riding around the streets on it saying look at this, this is my best bike. that bike is now rotten and in the skip. It was the best present but it didn't last.

The present of Jesus, the present of our joy is what lasts. So be mindful of that. I think it's the last slide Josh, isn't it?

So delight this Christmas in the joy of Christmas as we go through this Advent season, as we today, though we didn't know it, recognize Gaudete Sunday, the joy of the Lord.

Our joy comes from Jesus. And this is a quote, that joy that flooded the hearts of the shepherds, the angels, the wise men, the hosts of heaven, and Mary and Joseph is the joy that still has the power to overwhelm our hearts with rejoicing.

[28 : 29] Isn't that lovely? The same joy that the shepherds felt as they met the newborn Jesus, that joy we can know in our hearts this Christmas.

So this Christmas time, let us delight in the joy that comes from heaven, the joy that comes from the birth of Jesus, and the difference he makes in our lives.

Amen. skill