

Sermon for December 13, 2020 - Reverend Derek White
“What Are We Waiting For?” Part III (ADVENT)

Scripture: Psalm 96

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the LORD, all you families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns.” The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.

INTRODUCTION:

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. As you may have noticed, it is pink instead of purple. This candle is sometimes called the Shepherd’s Candle and it symbolizes joy.

This is the third part of our series on “What Are We Waiting For?”. The first week we focused on Hope as our first candle of Advent. Last week was on the message of faith and preparation in faith formation. The second candle of Advent represents faith and preparation. And today is the candle of joy.

PART ONE: JOY AS A BLESSING

Let me share a story of joy. A decade ago, my son Silas was born. My uncle shared a story with me about the birth of his first son David, my cousin. Now Dave has

always seemed to have a very blessed life. It is like there is some kind of anointing on him. My uncle shared that when David was born, he prayed a prayer of blessing on David. This was like the Old Testament account of Abraham passing down a blessing through the first-born son.

I thought about what my uncle said and decided I wanted to give Silas, my first born, a blessing as well. But a blessing should be for a specific thing. I didn't know what to bless Silas with. I thought about all the things I could ask God to bless him with. Should I ask for him to be blessed with wisdom or wealth? But as I prayed about it, I realized I knew people with wisdom and wealth that also were unhappy. Wisdom and wealth are a blessing but can also come with hard challenges. I just wanted Silas to grow up and make his own choices someday. Whatever those choices would be, I wanted him to be happy in life. I wanted him to have joy in his life. And that is what I blessed Silas with. I asked God to bless Silas with joy. Joy is a gift that comes from God.

PART TWO: MARY AND ELIZABETH WERE FILLED WITH JOY

When Mary found out she would be a mother she was filled with joy. In the Gospel of Luke, we have the Magnificat, which is this prayer that is like a song of praise and adoration. Her joy is overflowing as an expectant mother with this child to be. Even before Jesus is born, Mary can feel the joy of the Lord within her. It is a reminder that even before Jesus is born, He brings joy to the world. Because of the prophecies, the joy of this child to come was known. There is joy to be found in Jesus.

Now Mary had a cousin named Elizabeth. And we may remember that when Mary went to go visit Elizabeth who was also with child, at a distance Elizabeth's baby began to kick within the womb. And Elizabeth recognizes the child Mary has as being special. As a matter of fact, John the Baptist is believed to be the cousin of Jesus that was born of Elizabeth. So even before John was born, he recognized Jesus in Mary's womb as the Son of Man and the Messiah to come. Elizabeth says the baby in her womb leapt with joy and was filled with the Holy Spirit when Mary came to visit while still with child. This is an extraordinary thing - the joy felt by others even before Jesus was born. Mary's child is the one who would bring joy to the world.

Joy is a gift that comes from God, and through Jesus the world felt it even before his birth in Bethlehem.

PART 3: JOY OF SIMEON AND ANNA

Similar to the story of Mary and Elizabeth, there was a man named Simeon who lived in Jerusalem. God had promised Simeon that he would see the coming of the Messiah within his lifetime. He was a prophet. When Mary and Joseph took Jesus as a baby to Jerusalem to be dedicated as was the tradition in those days, Simeon recognized Jesus as a baby as being the Messiah. He leapt with joy that the Lord had fulfilled his promise to him. Simeon shared with Mary and Joseph that this child would lead to the rise and fall of many in Israel. When Simeon saw Jesus, he praised God. Even as a newborn baby, others felt the joy of the Lord through him.

There was also a woman who was a prophetess in Jerusalem like Simeon who was also waiting for the coming of the Messiah. When she saw Jesus, she gave thanks to God and shared with Mary and Joseph that this child Jesus would lead to the redemption on Jerusalem, that Jesus was destined to do great things.

Jesus clearly stood out in crowds even as a small baby and others sensed the joy of the Lord through him. Before he could even speak or walk, he was known as an anointed child that would fulfill the prophecies of the one for whom generations had waited to come. Jesus is the one who brings joy to the world.

PART 4: JOY IS A BLESSING

Joy is a blessing that comes from God. And joy is more than just happiness. Joy lasts longer than happiness. We might be happy or sad for a short time, but joy stays with us regardless if we are happy or sad. Think of the moments in our lives that fill us with joy. Maybe it was the birth of a child or a niece or nephew. Perhaps it was finding that person who would be your spouse and the wedding day. Think of joy as that moment that even when we might feel sad or blue that still fills us with joy. Joy is eternal and it comes from God. Joy is lasting, not fleeting like happiness or sadness. Joy is like a fountain that springs up and always flows. Joy is that gift from God.

One of the amazing things about joy is that it is a gift from God that can be shared with others. Just like Jesus and the Good News Jesus brings is a message of hope

and encouragement that can be shared. There are many ways we can share joy with others.

CONCLUSION:

We have joy in our lives because we receive blessings in small acts of kindness. We see the possibility of things with hope when we rejoice at the birth of a child or a new beginning. As we come into this Christmas Season, let us consider the ways we can fill others with joy in the blessing we can share. Maybe it is giving a Christmas gift to the Church, or providing an opportunity for education through Compassion International, or sustainable farming of a hungry family through Heifer International or a Local Food Bank. It could be dropping a little gift off on the doorstep of a neighbor. Perhaps adding some people to the Christmas Card list. Even adding some lights in the yard around the house to spread cheer during this difficult time. We have the ability to bless others and add to the joy and happiness of those around us this Christmas Season. So what are we waiting for?