

“Joy”

Luke 2:10, Matthew 2:10, Isaiah 9:2-3, Psalm 148:1-13

Pastor James York

December 29, 2024

Prayer for Understanding God of angel choruses and contagious laughter, we know that you speak to us in the quiet. We know that when we bow our heads and fall to our knees, you are there, calling our names. We also trust that when we throw our heads back in laughter, when we dance and clap with joy, when we skip and sing with gratitude, you are speaking. Open our ears and hearts to hear what it is that you are saying. Fill us with joy, delight, and the hope of Christmas. Reveal the wisdom we need to hear today. With hearts full of gratitude. We laugh. We rejoice! We listen. Amen.

Luke 2:10 “The angel reassured them. “Do not be afraid! I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.”

The birth of Jesus brings good news of great joy to all people, which is cause for celebration. On this Sunday after Christmas, we encourage you to let go of fear and let come joy, let go of to-dos and let come spontaneous play, relax, and laugh. For joyful laughter is like hope—it has a ripple effect. Joyful laughter is one way we share good news and bless the world. Let us join the angels in shining and proclaiming God is bringing good news of great joy to all people.

Joy has a contagious ripple effect. I invite you to close your eyes. Picture the things in your life that bring you joy. It could be something as simple as a warm beverage on a cold morning, or as grand as a person, a place, or an experience. Now take a moment to reflect on this question: What brings you joy? *One Minute of Silence* Amen. After our response I invite you to share the joy of God as a greeting and response. And to share a joy. Move around. Try to greet everyone. We are going to share the joy for 4 minutes.

Matthew 2:10 “When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!”

Joy is a vibrant thread woven through our spiritual fabric. Joy weaves us together with all people. Joy weaves us together with the stars. Joy weaves us together with the cosmos.

As refreshing and unexpected as snowflakes caught on our tongues, laughter lightens our spirits, laughter invites us to see the world through a lens of divine playfulness, laughter enables us to soar. Happiness is fleeting. Happiness is dependent on circumstances. Joy is a deep-seated feeling that comes from God. Joy remains even in the face of adversity, reminding us of the hope and love that surrounds us at all times and in all circumstances. Joy is a sacred invitation to lessen our self-seriousness and remember that the God of all things often subverts our notions of what is holy. In our cold world, joy is a sweater we can wrap ourselves in, offering comfort and protection against the elements. Our compassionate God knows every sorrow and sends the joy of heaven to revive us, joy to release our clutch on control. God sends joy to help us smile, sing, dance, and thrill.

Joy and laughter are responses to God’s action and are imperatives. Joy invite us to celebrate the divine playfulness in creation. Consider the shepherds and wise people. Profound joy punctuates their encounters with God. Their reactions to the news of Jesus’ birth are more than moments of happiness. Their reactions are transformative experiences, theological revelations that invite them—and us—to view the world and our place in it through a lens of wonder and delight. The shepherds, often overlooked in society, were bathed in heavenly light and received the joyous news of a savior’s birth, reminding us that joy is for everyone. Their immediate, uncontainable joy bubbles up and over as they spread the good news of what they have seen and heard, embodying the contagious nature of divine delight. Imagine the ridiculous spectacle of a gaggle of shepherds crowding into the place where Jesus was born. They suspended their grumpiness, their *it can’t be*, their *it is not possible*. They burst into the delivery room to see if what the angels said really was true. It was true. Jesus is good news of great joy for everyone, regardless of status, wealth, or identity. The wise people guided by the light of a star discovered more than a newborn king. They experienced the joyful fulfillment of ancient prophecies. Joy helps us

process the harsh realities of our world and gives us strength for the long and winding journey. The wise people's journey culminated in laughter filled worship, with jubilant dancing and robust singing as the hopes and dreams of all the years are being fulfilled by Jesus. Let us be overwhelmed with joy.

The wise people brought gifts. The gold of fulfillment. The frankincense of worship. The myrrh of eternal joyful life. Let us present to God our offering.

Isaiah 9:2-3 “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. People will rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest!”

How would you explain a sunset to someone who is blind? The prophet Isaiah is trying to describe the illumination of joy. The joy of people as they perceive the redeeming light of God piercing through profound darkness. Joy is a divine gift and joy is a human response. Your joy matters. The cosmos needs your joy to be complete. Often, we are focused on what seems possible and realistic. Joy invites us to imagine us enjoying the impossible. We have a God who became an infant gurgling and giggling, a toddler squealing and erupting into laughter. God is love in human flesh. God is a child. Liberate your inner child. Imagine yourself playing with the child Jesus. Building a snowperson. Playing tag. Rolling in the grass. Blowing bubbles. Building towers. Going on grand imaginary adventures. God desires to be your playmate. God longs to fill you with wonder, playfulness and joy. What would it look like to embrace laughter as a spiritual practice this week? Make room in your heart for delight. Embrace your inner child. Joy is a sacred invitation to savor the gladness of life. Joy is energy.

A blessing from Kayla Craig: “As you navigate the cold complexities of our weary world, wrap yourself in joy's warm embrace. May you accept the invincible joy that Christ freely offers—a joy that assures you that you are known, loved, and forever held within God's compassionate embrace. May the joy of the Lord be your strength, helping you stay awake to wonder and awe when the darkness of the world closes in.”

Psalm 148:1-13 “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise God from the skies! Praise God, all angels! Praise God, all in heaven! Praise God, sun and moon! Praise God, all you twinkling stars! Praise God, skies above! Praise God, vapors high above the clouds! Let every created thing give praise to the Lord, for God commanded and all came into being. God set them in place forever and ever. God's decree will never be revoked. Praise the Lord from the earth, you creatures of the ocean depths, fire and hail, snow and clouds, wind and weather that obey God, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all livestock, small scurrying animals and birds, kings of the earth and all people, rulers and judges of the earth, young people, old people and children. Let them all praise the name of the Lord. For God's name is very great; God's glory towers over the earth and heaven! Praise the Lord!”

Quantum physics has discovered that all in the cosmos is constantly vibrating in unique ways. Spiritual all is joyfully dancing in praise of God. So even when you are not able to joyful dance in worship the tiniest parts of you, your essence, is constantly joyfully dancing to glorify God. Joy is an eternal vibration throughout all creation constantly proclaiming universal joy and good news to all. The horizon expands in all directions. Joy will expand forever. Joy is the trees of the field clapping their hands. Joy is the mountains proclaiming glory. Joy is you being your true self.

“Holy & Unhindered”

a poem by Sarah Speed

I am sure it is important to close your eyes, to pray on your knees, to fling yourself into deep reverence and even deeper humility. I am sure the Spirit is close when we dress up, when we sing the descant line, when we murmur the words with a sincere and hopeful heart. And I am sure that when you moonwalk through your living room in soft wool socks, when you cackle loudly enough for the whole restaurant to hear, when you squeal into the phone and make pancakes for dinner, when you plunge your hands into the dirt and talk to the sparrows, when you make a mess of Communion breadcrumbs all around the Table, or when you allow yourself an undone, unhindered, unpolished sort of joy—that the Spirit loves that just as well. The angel said, do not be afraid; I am bringing you joy.” We humans have spent a lot of time focusing on the fear. Do not forget: God is also in the joy.