



Joy

Sunday
15th December, 2024

Joy in the Waiting:

*A Surprise
in the
Season of Advent*



Breaking Open the Word

Prepared by

Dennis Webster

St Peter's by the Lake
Paynesville, Victoria Australia
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland

INTRODUCTION

READINGS

Zephaniah 3.14-20

Canticle: Isaiah 12.2-6*

Philippians 4.4-7

Luke 3.7-18

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee: Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

In Dennis' sermon titled "Joy in the Waiting: A Surprise in the Season of Advent," he warmly invites the congregation to explore the beautiful theme of joy throughout the Advent season. He shares that true joy transcends superficial pleasures, referencing C.S. Lewis's idea of joy as a profound surprise that lifts us even amidst life's imperfections.

With encouraging biblical references, including Paul's heartfelt exhortation to rejoice in Philippians and Zephaniah's hopeful call to delight, Dennis emphasises how joy can shine brightly even in our most challenging moments.

He highlights those unexpected bursts of joy we can find as we await the arrival of Christ, reminding us of God's unwavering presence and deep faithfulness.

Dennis also thoughtfully delves into the call for repentance marked by John the Baptist, presenting it as an uplifting opportunity for renewal and transformation. Rather than seeing

repentance negatively, he encourages the congregation to embrace it as a hopeful path to new beginnings.

The sermon wraps up with a heartfelt encouragement to embrace joy while we wait, recognising that God is actively renewing and working within us.

Through prayer and living with purpose, Dennis inspires everyone to remain open to the delightful surprises of joy that God places along our journey, helping us foster a deeper connection with Him during this meaningful season.

Please note: this sermon was not delivered as a result of the author still being laid low with COVID-19.

Blessed still be the supermarket van arriving with paracetamol and fresh coffee!

Prayer

- Please pray for the courage to live out the sermon's message this week, especially in challenging situations.
- Think about showing love and kindness to those around you and asking God for guidance.
- You can reflect on any areas in your life where you need forgiveness, both to give and to receive, and lift those in prayer.
- Consider who could benefit from your support and encouragement, and pray for the wisdom to reach out to them.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

As we embrace this beautiful Advent season, let's take a fantastic opportunity to reflect on the theme of joy together. It's heartwarming to remember that this joy goes beyond the fun we might share at a festive barbecue or the delightful treat of a box of chocolates.

No, it's something deeper and more meaningful. C.S. Lewis captured this beautifully by referring to joy as a delightful surprise that unexpectedly brightens our hearts, even in the face of life's imperfections.

Today, we have the wonderful opportunity to discover how this special joy can warm our lives and hearts as we await Christ, both now and in the days ahead.

The Call to Rejoice Amid Uncertainty

Let's start with Philippians 4:4–7, where Paul writes: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice!"

Paul may not have been enjoying a coffee in a café when he wrote these words—he was in prison! Nevertheless, he beautifully expresses a joy that transcends all circumstances

and emanates from God's loving presence.

The message from Zephaniah resonates deeply with this idea. In Zephaniah 3:14–20, the prophet joyfully proclaims:

"Sing aloud, O daughter Zion... Rejoice and exult with all your heart!"

At the core of it all, Zephaniah extended his hand to a downtrodden city. Yet, he invited them to embrace joy—not to ignore their challenges, but to shine a light on the hope that awaits discovery.

Similarly, Advent joy catches us off guard, often appearing when we need it most.

C.S. Lewis and the Surprise of Joy
C.S. Lewis shared a profound thought about joy. It is a deep longing for something greater—like our hearts yearning for God, even before we fully recognise Him. It feels as if we catch a glimpse of something truly wonderful just beyond this world.

Advent wonderfully embodies this feeling of anticipation! As we eagerly await Christmas, we

cherish the hope of Christ's return. This meaningful season often surprises us with joy while we wait, reminding us of God's unwavering faithfulness.

Isaiah 12:2–6 expresses this sentiment so wonderfully: "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid... With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

This joy embraces the tough times and flourishes beautifully from our deep trust in God's promises.

The Challenge of John the Baptist

Let's pause to reflect on John the Baptist! Although he may not be the ideal guest for a Christmas party, he offers valuable insights. In Luke 3:7–18, he speaks with boldness and passion:

"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

Though these words may initially appear sombre, there's a remarkable aspect to reflect on: John's message of repentance is brimming with joy! You might wonder why.

The answer is straightforward—repentance paves the way for fresh starts. It may require some

effort, similar to sprucing up your home before inviting guests, but the following sense of fulfilment makes it all worthwhile!

John invites us to concentrate on Jesus, who graciously offers baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire. This journey isn't merely about remaining comfortable but embracing transformation together.

True joy often flourishes when we're willing to let go of the old and create space for the fantastic new things ahead!

Living in Joyful Anticipation

Finding joy as we await Christ is a truly amazing journey! Let's explore Philippians 4:4–7 together. Paul beautifully connects joy with prayer, gratitude, and trust in God. Here's how we can genuinely embrace this:

Rejoicing Always:
Joy isn't just about feeling happy all the time; it's about cherishing the promise that God's love surrounds us always

Gentleness in Relationships:
When filled with God's joy, we naturally become kinder and more loving toward others.

Freedom from Anxiety:
Instead of letting worries take

over, we can turn to prayer and place our trust in Him.

Peace Beyond Understanding:
This joy wraps around us like a warm embrace, calming our hearts amid life's upheavals. Isaiah reminds us of this joy! By drawing from "the wells of salvation," we uncover a resilience and deep gratitude that carry us through our waiting periods.

Prepare with Purpose

John the Baptist's call to repentance joyfully reminds us that joy and preparation go hand in hand! Repentance isn't about getting John the Baptist's call to repentance joyfully reminds us that joy and preparation go hand in hand!

Repentance isn't about getting stuck in the negatives; it's an extraordinary opportunity to reconnect with God and embrace the joy of His forgiveness.

Here are some ways we can share this experience: stuck in the negatives, it's an extraordinary chance to reconnect with God and embrace the joy of His forgiveness.

Here are some ways we can share this experience:

Renewal:
Welcoming repentance brings a refreshing breeze to our relationship with God.

Anticipation:
We can look forward to Christ with heartfelt hope!

Living with Purpose:
When we align ourselves with God's kingdom, we find true joy in serving others.

Bearing Fruit:
Love and justice naturally flow from a joy-filled heart. As we prepare, let's embrace the small surprises of joy God places in our path—such as a kind word, a peaceful moment of gratitude, or an unexpected blessing!

Embrace the Tension

While waiting may sometimes feel tough, joy is here to brighten our spirits! It reminds us that God is always working in our lives, even now. Just as Zephaniah beautifully expresses:

"The Lord, your God, is in your midst... He will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in His love."

This Advent, let's joyfully embrace the surprises that every moment brings—discovering joy amid life's challenges and correcting their heart.

Prayer:
As we wait for your Son, fill our hearts with joy. Help us trust your promises, celebrate your presence, and prepare for your kingdom with hope and anticipation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

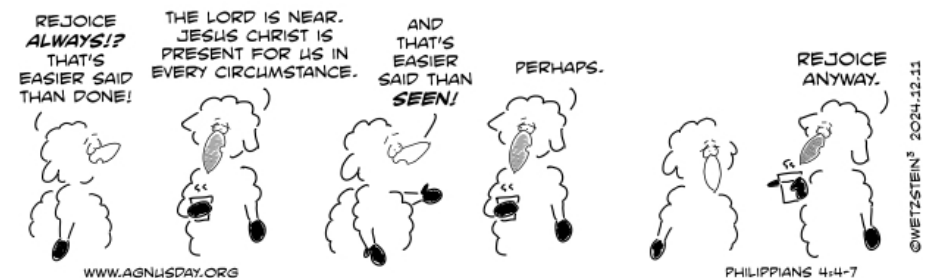
Main Points for a Reflection on Joy

This list of potential main points is designed to guide the development of a sermon on the theme of joy, particularly for an older congregation transitioning into retirement and seeking eternal rest in God.

1. The Source of True Joy
2. Joy Amid Transition
3. The Role of Community in Joy
4. Joy as a Fruit of the Spirit
5. The Promise of Eternal Joy
6. Joy in Serving Others
7. Overcoming Obstacles to Joy
8. The Importance of Gratitude
9. Joy in Worship
10. Living with Joyful Expectation

Conclusion

Each of these points can be woven together to create a cohesive message that reassures the congregation of the joy found in God and encourages us all to embrace this season of life with hope and peace.



Discussion Questions

What does 'Rejoice in the Lord always' from Philippians 4:4–7 truly signify?

This passage urges us to seek joy in God no matter our circumstances, much like Paul did while imprisoned.

Have you experienced a moment when finding joy felt challenging during tough times? How might reflecting on this verse have brought you comfort?

How can C.S. Lewis's concept of joy as a 'delightful surprise' relate to our daily experiences?

Lewis portrayed joy as an unexpected brightness that lifts our spirits, particularly during challenging moments.

What surprising instances of joy have you encountered lately that shifted your view on a particular situation?

How do you interpret the connection between joy and repentance, as discussed in the message regarding John the Baptist?

John the Baptist highlights that repentance brings fresh starts and renewed joy.

What surprising instances of joy have you encountered lately that shifted your perspective on a situation?

As mentioned in the sermon, what steps can we take to cultivate joy during Advent?

The sermon emphasises that joy arises from preparation through kindness, renewal, and sharing joyous moments.

What specific actions will you undertake this Advent season to spread joy to those around you?

As highlighted in the sermon, how can we discover tranquillity in life's unpredictability?

The sermon emphasises that joy envelops us like a comforting hug, providing peace even during challenging moments.

When confronted with anxiety, what strategies can you use to recall the joys and affirmations in your life that promote a sense of calm?

This five-day devotional will explore the sermon from this weekend in greater depth. Throughout these days, we'll explore the concept of joy during Advent, reflecting on essential scriptures and insights to enrich our anticipation and celebration of Christ's coming.



Day 1 *Philippians 4:4–7*

In today's devotional, we pause to consider Paul's inspiring reminder to rejoice. Despite facing the hardships of imprisonment, Paul consciously focuses on his relationship with God, teaching us that genuine joy arises from this bond rather than our situations. As we journey through life's highs and lows, we can discover a resilient joy that uplifts our spirits and alters our perspective, motivating us to rejoice always.

With the Advent season upon us, let's warmly embrace the invitation to find joy in every situation, trusting in God's ever-present faithfulness. This joy is a guiding light, offering us peace and reassurance that God's love remains constant no matter what we face. By leaning into this joy, we prepare our hearts for the hope and promise of Christ's coming.

- How can I focus on God's presence in my life daily?
- What circumstances challenge my ability to rejoice?
- In what small ways can I express gratitude today?
- Pray for a deeper understanding of God's love in challenging times.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit to help you cultivate joy in your heart.

Day 2 *Zephaniah 3:14–20*

Today's scripture encourages us to sing and rejoice, echoing the joyful message of the prophet Zephaniah. His words emphasise that joy stems not from our external circumstances but from an inner light that radiates through our faith in God. Throughout Advent, we are reminded that joy can thrive despite our struggles and challenges, bringing hope and renewed energy.

As we ponder this passage, let's consider how our voices can unite in a joyful chorus, even in waiting times. True joy blossoms from knowing that God is with us, actively involved in our daily journeys, and holding onto the promise of restoration. This Advent season, may our hearts overflow with joy beyond our expectations and circumstances.

- What areas in my life need the light of joy?
- How can I celebrate God's presence in my daily life?
- In what ways can I share my joy with others?
- Pray for restoration in areas where you feel joy is lacking.
- Ask God to fill your heart with hope and a renewed sense of joy.

Day 3 *Isaiah 12:2–6*

When we think about Isaiah's inspiring words, we are reminded of the incredible joy that comes from our salvation. Drawing water from the wells of salvation beautifully symbolises our deep trust in God. During this Advent season, we are invited to eagerly look forward to the joy of Christ's return in unfolding history and our journeys. Our connection with God flows like a wellspring of joy that supports us through tough times.

As we wait with hope, our faith in God can encourage us to share the beauty of His salvation, inviting others to discover this incredible, transformative joy. Let's find comfort in the safety of God's promises and celebrate the life-giving water He graciously provides.

- How does my faith in God impact my experience of joy?
- What does it mean to me to draw from the wells of salvation?
- In whom can I share the joy of salvation?
- Pray for the ability to experience and share joy through your faith.
- Seek God's guidance on how to embody hope and joy during Advent.

Day 4 *Luke 3:7–18*

Today, we look closer at John the Baptist's call to repentance, which holds a beautiful message of joy beneath the surface. While his words may sound stern, they're an invitation to start anew, illuminating the hope that

repentance brings. As we open our hearts during Advent, let's embrace the opportunity for transformation and the exciting possibilities that Christ offers. Repentance is about recognising what's amiss and lifting us into God's grace.

It's a joyful journey of reconnecting with our Creator, helping us shed old burdens and welcome new joys into our lives. As we ponder this call, may we all feel inspired to let joy bloom through meaningful connections with God and each other.

- What needs to change in my life to welcome joy?
- How does repentance create space for new beginnings?
- Am I willing to embrace the challenges that come with transformation?
- Pray for the courage to confront areas of life needing change.
- Ask God to strengthen your resolve to pursue joy through repentance.

Day 5 *Philippians 4:4–7*

As we reach this final day, let's revisit Philippians, where Paul beautifully connects joy with prayer and gratitude. Living with joyful anticipation of Christ's return truly fills our hearts and strengthens our spirits, especially during uncertain times. By nurturing a lifestyle centred around joy, we reflect God's promises and share them with everyone around us.

As we wrap up this journey, let's embrace gentleness, gratitude, and trust. Choosing joy means actively sharing it with others, creating supportive communities and deepening our relationships. In every moment of waiting, remember that joy profoundly impacts a believer's life, anchoring us in God's everlasting love presence.

- How can I actively show joy in my daily interactions?
- What does it mean to rejoice always in a practical sense?
- How can gratitude enhance my experience of joy?
- Thank God for His constant love and grace.
- Pray for an overflow of joy in your life and others around you.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press)

The Worship Cloud: articles by N.T. Wright and Jane Williams

Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>



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This is produced on
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