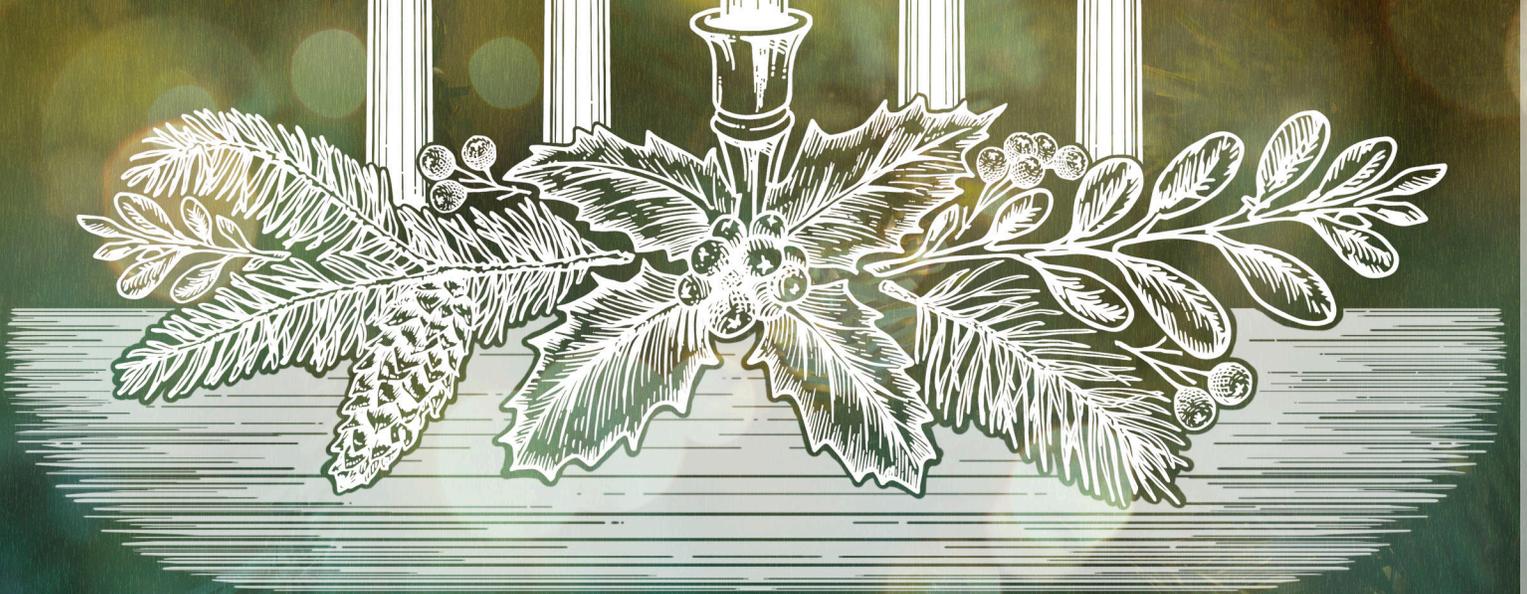




ADVENT

A SEASON OF EXPECTATION



2021 ADVENT READER
WEEK 3: JOY



JOY

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12
THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
BY: ALAN PETERS



READING: Luke 1:57-80

Luke's recording of Zachariah and Elizabeth's interactions with God at the birth of their son John reminds me of the shape of an hourglass. At the top, there is a wide span of Old Testament history and events which pointed to a future crystallizing event and person. With John the Baptist, events have narrowed down to the person who would herald the arrival of a saviour. The period of anticipation finally started to focus down to a single person – Jesus.

As we approach this event, it indicates to me of how God chooses to work through his people in the process. I presume God could have used his own spectacular way of introducing his son Jesus, but instead he chose to work through his created people, and often somewhat unlikely people at that. Zechariah and Elizabeth were not expected to have children in their old age. And Zechariah was not the perfect image of faith in that he was struck with an inability to speak when he was skeptical of their ability to have a child. However, their son John was the advertiser that God chose to introduce Jesus. And to emphasize his point, God restored Zechariah's ability to speak when, in obedience to God, Zechariah affirmed Elizabeth's statement that they would name him John. Zechariah subsequently prophesies of the roles that John and Jesus will play in human history.

PRAYER: "Father, thank you for seeking relationship with us and involving us in your salvation process. Help us to be your obedient messengers"



READING: Luke 3:1-6

When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we're being led not to see God in our stories but to see our stories in God's. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves. – Eugene Peterson (*The Invitation*)

This passage starts off by listing seven men who hold significant positions of prominence and power, followed by an eighth who doesn't at all look like he belongs in the conversation. That's because by any measure he really doesn't.

John the Baptist, John the son of Zechariah, is completely antithetical to the men that precede him in this passage. Whereas those men lived in grand homes and enjoyed much privilege and status at the top of society, John made his home in the wilderness. While the other seven were at the very center of society's political and religious life, John found himself at the outskirts. Those heavyweight leaders were accustomed to the world revolving around them; John made his orbit around Jesus. You couldn't have had a starker contrast.

This is reflected in John's mindset as well. John knows that he is not the central figure in his own story. And yet, he is confident and secure in his role to be his cousin's herald. For certain, he had his moments where he doubted (see Matthew 11:1-19), but his attitude is best reflected in his own words: *"The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less."* (John 3:29-30)

John knew his role and how his life fit into God's larger story. This didn't make his life any easier or more comfortable (see the aforementioned Matthew 11:1-19 as well as 14:1-12). But it enabled him to find purpose, security and joy despite the challenges and suffering that came his way.

It's easy to put ourselves at the center of our story or expect the world to revolve around us. Even more so when life is painful, unpredictable, or scary. So what happens when we resist placing ourselves at the centre of our story? What if we, like John before us, seek to orbit around Jesus and make Him the most important person in our story?

In a time when we are frequently left feeling disorientated and disappointed, John's example is an invitation we could follow towards a new reorientation. Perhaps we need to do more than just pay attention to how God shows up in our lives, and instead reverse it: start seeing how our lives fit into God's grand redemptive story. Perhaps this is how we can find the hope, peace, and joy we so badly need this year.

How are you being nudged to reorientate yourself around Jesus this Christmas season?

PRAYER: Author of all life, help me to see my place in your grand story and find joy by orientating my life around you.

JOY

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14
THE JOY OF GIVING
BY: SYLVIA CASEY



READING: Luke 3:7-18

Advent – preparing for the arrival of Jesus. This passage in Luke reflects this in the literal sense, as John the Baptist says “one who is more powerful than I will come...” (v16) and in the heart of John’s teaching the various groups of people what it would look like for them to repent when they asked what they should do (vv 10-14) To the crowd: “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.” To the tax collectors: “Don’t collect any more than you are required to.” To the soldiers: “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.” In hearing these words, “the people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah” (v15).

Considering this new way of living in the light of Advent, I cannot help but think of the phrase “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” While I do believe that is true, and have experienced it, I have found that it is important to pay attention to our motivation in giving. Giving out of a sense of obligation often leads to resentment. Giving out of a sense of freedom and love brings great joy.

Verses 16-18 says Jesus “will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.” There was a lot more of this—words that gave strength to the people, words that put heart in them.

PRAYER: Jesus, as we wait and prepare to celebrate Your arrival, we ask the question the people asked John: What is ours to do differently? As we consider this question, help us to look at it not as a burden, but as a way to joyfully express Your way of life in us and through us as individuals and as a church community.

JOY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15
SHARING THE JOY
BY: NATALIE DAHL



READING: Isaiah 12:2-6

The passages for today are the words spoken to the people of Judah directly following Isaiah's prophecy that a Branch (Jesus) will shoot from the stump of Jesse, a life-giving force of counsel and might, wisdom and understanding, will grow out of the dead thing that the line of kings has become. This new King, Isaiah writes, will change everything, and create a new realm of peace. In the context of these hopes and promises, Isaiah encourages the people of Judah to trust in the Lord their God and not to be afraid.

This act of trusting and not fearing that Isaiah calls the people into is active and vibrant and intended to be lived out loud. Just as the Root of Jesse (Jesus) stands as a banner for all people, so also the people of Judah will sing of the glorious things the Lord has done to all the nations.

As I read and reflect on these passages, I think of how easy and 'natural' it sometimes feels to keep the glorious things that the Lord has done to myself or a select few in my life, as if somewhere along the line I trained myself to do it. It can feel very awkward and vulnerable to talk about good things, especially when we, the world we live in, and the people we know experience terrible pain and loss. However, joy held alone grows dim. Therefore, I also have to remind myself that proclaiming joy is an act of resistance that we all must participate in. To do so does not devalue suffering but helps us to draw again and again the refreshing and renewing water from the well of salvation.

Again, we hear Isaiah say, "I will trust and not be afraid." For the people of Judah, the day that they were waiting for was a long way off, centuries in fact. For us, it has happened and is happening and even so the practice of Advent reminds us that there is still waiting yet to do.

Because this is a chapter of action, I invite all of you to participate in sharing joy tonight with those around you, or if you eat alone, to carry it with you to your next coffee or meal with those that you love. I've included [A Liturgy for Feasting with Friends](#), written by Doug McKelvey, that speaks to the heart of Isaiah's encouragement. Read this liturgy with your group and take time to share a moment, small or large, from this week of success or joy or gloriousness around your table tonight. To lift your cups and proclaim to each other "Take Joy!" May we remember and be strengthened together.

JOY

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16

THE LORD GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST

BY: CRYSTAL GELDERMAN



READING: Zephaniah 3:14-20

This passage is so full of promises for the Israelites! Promises to end trouble/distress, to be present, to comfort those who mourn, to release them from the hands of the oppressors, and to put honour upon them, to name a few.

Specifically, take a look at verse 17. This has always been one of my favourite verses in the Bible.

The Lord your God is in your midst.

Here. Now. Fully present. I see this as being wholly surrounded. Within my presence.

He is mighty - a victorious warrior and saviour.

Of whom shall we be afraid?

He will rejoice over you with joy.

He will celebrate you. Revel in you.

He will quiet you with his love (or, you will rest in his love, he will renew you with his love).

I love the image of being quieted with his love. Sometimes I can't seem to quiet my mind, and restlessness just takes over. What does this mean to you? What do you imagine?

He will delight (joy, exult, rejoice) over you with (loud) singing.

Can you imagine? The same God who spoke creation into being is now singing over you? How does this make you feel?

Those promises were not only to the Jews - they are for us as well. What does this text tell you about God? How do you see this playing out in your life?

PRAYER: Jesus, help me reflect on the love you have for me and those around me. Quiet my spirit when needed, and remind me of your love and delight in me.

JOY

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17
THE BIGGER PICTURE
BY: CAROLINE PON



READING: Isaiah 55:1-13

This passage has been a favourite of mine in the last few years.

God is inviting me to receive

“Come you who are weary.
...and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.
incline your ear and your soul shall live”

God is inviting me to be forgiven.

“Call upon Him while he can be found”

God is inviting me to recognize that God’s thoughts are not my thoughts, and His ways are vastly higher than mine.

It’s been humbling. But it also is a source of joy and peace to know that God has a bigger picture and purpose that I may not see. I can rest knowing that God and his word are at work in our lives. I’m learning to ask, “What purpose and plan do you have in this situation? Help me to recognize your word at work. What is my part?”

PRAYER: Lord, help me to incline my ear to hear your voice, to turn my soul and repent – show me that things that I am blind to. Let your word do it’s work in my life and change me. Let me have joy and peace as I trust in your thoughts and ways.

JOY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18
GARMENTS OF JOY
BY: MARK HILDEBRANDT



READING: Isaiah 61-4, 8-11

The prophet Isaiah was given this great message from the Lord by his spirit. This message would bring joy and comfort, would bring togetherness and wholeness to a people displaced and separated from each other and their homeland. This message would bring beauty from that which was burnt out and reduced to ashes. They would once again be able to wear their festive garments, full of color and elegance, which they wore during those special celebratory events of thanksgiving to the Lord. They would once again stand as shining examples of God's goodness and glory for nations everywhere. (This message from God seems very timely in the season we are now living, in the whole world but also right here at home in Abbotsford).

Jesus brought this same message to the people of his day and to further generations as he read this same message in the temple that day, as recorded in Luke 4:18-19. This message Jesus brought was an eternal message, one that had not changed in the past, nor would it change in the present, nor would it change in the future. Why? Because God's word is true, God loves what is right and just, and he loves because he is love.

Verses 10 and 11 overwhelm me (just as verse 10 begins with) with humility as I know I am not worthy, yet He makes us worthy. I am overwhelmed with joy, my heart bursting within me, as I picture how I will look as God adorns me with clothes set aside for me. What better feeling than to be clothed in such beauty and splendour as God prepares us for himself. Verse 11 with its imagery of the garden in Spring, with plants pushing up out of the soil, over here, and over there, and there too! God's righteousness and justice will become evident in his garden everywhere; and not only evident but it will flourish into his spectacular garden.

Thank you God!