



ADVENT *Joy*

CELEBRATION OF THAT WHICH IS GOOD

**WEEK
THREE**



READ

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

PSALM 118:24 (NLT)

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

MATTHEW 2:10

UNDERSTAND

There's nothing better than Christmas morning when you're a kid. The anticipation of what's waiting when you're a kid. The anticipation of what's waiting under the tree or in your stocking starts as soon as you open your eyes. You jump out of bed, run down the stairs, and just the sight of what's arrived for you on Christmas morning fills you with joy.

Now, think back to the story of the birth of Christ. Even then, so many were waiting with anticipation for His arrival. They were looking forward with so much expectation to what they'd so long believed was coming—the Savior who would end their waiting and renew their joy.

And when the people then finally got word that their Savior had come, they were filled with joy. Just the sight of the star that would lead them to Christ filled them with more joy than we could even imagine. It was like Christmas morning times a million!

This Advent season, don't miss out on the opportunity to let Christ fill you with that same joy. Remember what His arrival meant for the world--for your world--and let that fill your heart with the joy of a life changed by Jesus.

RESPOND

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What's one thing you're anticipating or looking forward to this season?
2. What things bring you joy in your life?
3. How can you experience the joy of Christ this Advent season?
4. How can you share that joy with others?

FAMILY TIME

What brings you joy? A good meal, a kind gesture, a fun time with your family? Talk with your kids about the things in their lives that make them feel joyful.

Then, create a "Joy Jar" where each one of you can keep track of the things that bring you joy during the Advent season. Everytime a member of your family has a joyful experience, they can write it down and place it in the "Joy Jar". Keep the project going until the jar is filled to the top!

When the jar is full, sit down together as a family and read the contents of the "Joy Jar" together. This is a great opportunity to not only remember some of the things that brought joy to your family this holiday season, but to also talk about why those things or experiences made you joyful.

Prayers of Joy

Here are five prayer prompts to invite and nurture a spirit of joy into each day this week. Use this guide with your family or small group.

WHEN YOU ABIDE

On your own: It's easy to believe in the Lord's goodness when life is going well. But what about when it's not. What are you allowing to steal your joy this Advent season? Reflect and discuss.

Pray together: *Lord, You are the One who fills our hearts with joy. Thank You for the way Your life changed our lives for the better. Thank You for the joy you made possible through Your Son. This Advent, fill us with Your joy. Amen.*

WHEN YOU WORSHIP

On your own: This Advent season, we not only lean in together, with joyful anticipation, awaiting the birth of Christ, but we also seek the Lord's movement in our church's future. What joys can we celebrate together as a body?

Pray together: *God of all comfort, who turns our sadness into joy, bringing life and hope where there was none—fill us with Your joy, that we might radiate it to others. Clothe us with joy, that we might clothe others with it as well. In the name of Christ. Amen.*

FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

On your own: Share the greatest joys the Lord has heaped upon you through your small group!

Pray together: *God of Abraham, who chose one family to bless the world, choose us to be Your means of blessing others. Fill us with Your Spirit, that we might share Your inheritance—life in all its fullness—with those in need. Help us to act justly and to always do what is right. Amen.*

FOR THOSE YOU SERVE

On your own: Obedience to the Lord brings great joy! As members of a body, we are called to serve using our time, talents, and gifts. Reflect and share on how serving your church has brought you great joy. If you haven't found a place to serve, ask the Lord to help you step into obedience and make His way clear to you.

Pray together: *Lord, you are the Giver of Joy! We ask that you reveal to us how we can serve others more cheerfully, wholeheartedly, and compassionately this holiday season. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the needs of our church family. We ask that you open up opportunities to practice selflessness and share the joy of a life with You, with others. Amen.*

FOR YOUR INTERSECTIONS WITH THE WORLD

On your own: Throughout the biblical story, we see God taking delight in transforming mourning into joy. While He does not prevent sadness, He does not let it have the final word. Perhaps one reason God allows us to experience difficult circumstances is so that we might know the joy of being delivered from them. This week, make sure you ask your five how you can pray for them, engage in meaningful conversation, and serve them.

Pray together: *Ruler of the earth, we give thanks to You, our King. We shout for joy and praise Your name. Help us to spread the good news of Your kingdom—through both word and deed—that others, too, might know Your joy. Amen.*

Small Group - Joy

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

FROM SHE READS TRUTH | ANDREA LUCADO

I once visited Mammoth Caves, a long series of underground caverns in Kentucky. The caverns would have been completely dark if it weren't for dim lights that had been installed for tours like ours. We stopped at one particular spot where we could hear a rushing stream. Our guide told us that the fish living in that water had no eyes. That's strange, I thought. And a little creepy. But then our guide explained: "Why grow eyes when you live only in darkness?"

They didn't know any better. Their world was dark. There was no need to see.

I think the only thing darker than darkness, is not knowing you're in darkness. Stumbling around this earth unaware of the light that could be warming you, that could be lighting your way.

Before Jesus, this was the state of humanity. We were "the people who walked in darkness...who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death" (Isaiah 9:2). Yet we didn't know. Sin was our normal.

The path toward death was the only road we had walked.

In darkness, we could not see our way. In darkness, things were unclear and unknown. In darkness, our sin was hidden. It was the ideal environment for fear, despair, and shame to thrive in.

But then came "the light of the world" (John 8:12). Jesus. He illuminated the path. He exposed our sin so that we could finally be healed. He made clear the world around us. He was joy in a world of growing fear and shame and despair. He gave us new eyes to see a new world, one that—unlike that of the poor fish in Mammoth Cave—was not dark, but full of light.

I remember when the grace of Christ first touched my life. The world looked different. Everything appeared more colorful and radiant, as if I had only been able to see one hue of God's creation and could now see it in a bolder, deeper color. I had a Savior who had died for my sin. I had been made righteous by His blood. There was absolutely nothing I could do to earn that righteousness, and there was nothing I could do to lose it. As my eyes were opened to this light, I was filled with a hope and joy and peace I had never experienced.

But the light of Christ doesn't stop with us. As Isaiah prophesied to the Israelites in captivity, "Arise,

shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). When we shine with the glory of the Lord, others see a light that points them toward Him—and one day, all will see this light.

That's something I love about Advent. It not only reminds of Jesus' birth, but it gives us an opportunity to look forward to when He will come again. When the glory that shined on Israel—the same glory that shines on us—will illuminate everything forever. A place where there will be no night, no need for a lamp or even the light of the sun, "for the Lord God gives them light" (Revelation 22:5). Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- Joy is a celebration of that which is good. What are you celebrating in this season?
- What areas of darkness are you trying to fight back?
- What do you feel joy when the author says, "He exposed our sin...."? Is there joy in knowing your sins have been exposed?

SOAP STUDY ON JOY

PSALM 118:24 (NLT)

S *This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.*

O

A

P

SOAP STUDY ON JOY

MATTHEW 2:10

S *When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.*

O

A

P

SOAP STUDY ON JOY

JOHN 15:5-8

S *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

O

A

P