

## Week of November 30, 2020: Untangling Christmas: Christmas Cheer



### Discussion Questions Set #1

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” (Luke 2:25-38)

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds ..” (James 1:2)

In sermon, it was suggested that we have tended to “tangle” our understanding of the significance of Christmas with all kinds of other “cheery” practices. In many ways, we tend to romanticize the events of the Nativity, which affects our understanding of the spiritual significance of these events.

1. Thinking of your own Christmas practices, can you identify any issues of entanglement? How might this affect the spiritual application of Christmas in your life?
2. Why is it that we often downplay the difficult aspects of the Nativity story, even as we experience growing trouble and strife in our world?
3. Thinking of both Simeon and Anna and their particular life circumstances, what is it that permitted them to experience joy in the midst of less than cheery life circumstances? To what exactly is their joy related? How are joy and trials – less than cheery circumstances – related?

### Discussion Questions Set #2

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy ...” (Galatians 5:22)

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ...” (Romans 14:17)

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11)

In sermon, the distinction was drawn between cheer and joy, pointing out that cheer is closely related to happiness which is dependent upon circumstances, whereas joy is of the Lord and is not necessarily bound to circumstances.

1. Why is it important that, as followers of Jesus, we recognize this distinction?
2. What is Christ’s desire for us in relation to joy?
3. Discuss what might occur if we opt to pursue cheer rather than ask for God’s gift of joy.
4. Discuss these terms in relation to the distinction between cheer and joy: optimism, criticism, and hope.

### Discussion Questions Set #3

“But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” (Luke 2:10)

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:8)

“We are to participate with God in bringing about the world promised by Christmas.” (Marcus J. Borg, *The First Christmas: What the Gospels Really Say About Jesus’s Birth*)

1. In light of the angels’ assertion to the shepherds on that first Christmas night, how can we “participate with God in bringing about the world promised by Christmas” in regards to our topic of joy?
2. What is our responsibility as followers of Jesus in relation to joy?