

Have you ever seen those ads where parents surprise their children with a trip to Disney World? Those moments are filled with pure, unadulterated happiness. But happiness is different from joy. Happiness is fleeting. A wonderful feeling, but fleeting nonetheless. With joy, a child whose birthday trip to Disney was ruined could still remain joyful knowing Mom and Dad still love, care, and value them. Happiness may make our hearts beat faster, but joy is the underlying heartbeat of stable emotions. The fact that Christ's coming means joy for the world, then, doesn't allude to our happiness. It speaks of our salvation. The joy of Christ is something we can rest our identity in because it will never fade, betray, or disappoint. The only thing that can truly satisfy us, truly sustain our joy, is Jesus. People, jobs, riches, power—all will mess with our stability on some level, but Jesus never will. To be whole, healthy, and truly satisfied, we need Jesus. The angels sang, "Do not be afraid. I bring you great news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). This week of Advent we look forward to a coming Christ who brings true and lasting joy. His joy permeates the foundations of our souls and offers us all of the acceptance, satisfaction, identity, purpose, and wealth that we need. Nothing before or since has delivered this lasting joy. So we anticipate the promise of a soul stabilized by the joy of Christ. And one day when he comes again, the line between joy and happiness will blur. We will live forever in a redeemed heaven and earth, and we will enjoy peace, hope, love, and the presence of our Savior for eternity. Come, Lord Jesus, the joy of the world.

Sunday:

Prayer: Pray this prayer throughout the day. Every time you sit down at a meal or sit at a red light, breathe this prayer and let God remind you of the joy he brings to the earth. For this week, also pray this in moments of monotony—reminding us that the joy of Christ isn't only in moments that bring us happiness, but in every moment of our lives. "Father, fill my soul with joy, and help me to be an instrument of joy."

Readings: • Micah 5:2-5a • Luke 1:46b-55 • Hebrews 10:5-10 • Luke 1:39-45

Discussion Question: What are some things of this world that make you happy? To what lengths do you go to chase after them?

Monday:

Prayer: "Father, fill my soul with joy, and help me to be an instrument of joy."

Readings: • Psalms 61, 62, 112, and 115 • Zephaniah 3:14-20 • Luke 1:1-25 • Titus 1:1-16

Discussion Question: Can you tell the difference between joy and happiness in your life? In what areas?

Tuesday:

Prayer: "Father, fill my soul with joy, and help me to be an instrument of joy."

Readings: • Psalms 66, 67, 116, 117 • 1 Samuel 2:1b-10 • Luke 1:26-38 • Titus 2:1-10

Discussion Question: What is an area of your life where you need more joy?

Wednesday:

Prayer: "Father, fill my soul with joy, and help me to be an instrument of joy."

Readings: • Psalms 72, 111, 113 • 2 Samuel 7:1-17 • Luke 1:39-56 • Titus 2:11-3:8a

Discussion Question: How do you respond in difficult or painful situations? What is your automatic reaction?

Thursday:

Prayer: "Father, fill my soul with joy, and help me to be an instrument of joy."

Readings: • Psalms 80, 146, 147 • 2 Samuel 7:18-29 • Luke 1:57-66 • Galatians 3:1-14

Discussion Question: How can you add the joy of Christ to moments of disappointment, weakness, or despair?

Friday:

Prayer: "Father, fill my soul with joy, and help me to be an instrument of joy."

Readings: Psalms 93, 96, 148, 150 Luke 1:67-80 Galatians 3:15-22

Discussion Question: How can you let joy be a part of your everyday existence?

Sermon Discussion

1. What one idea, concept or point stood out most prominently for you?
2. What questions remain about joy after hearing this sermon?
3. What one thing have you been challenged to do (to put into practice) through this sermon?

Application: In John 17, Jesus prayed that his disciples would have the full measure of his joy. Part of the way we experience the joy of Christ is through relationships and community. This week, do something out of the ordinary with your family, small group, or community. Take a break from everyday tasks and reflect on how the Coming King wants to bring joy and satisfaction to your souls. As the church, we are also called to spread joy to this earth. Sometime this week, bring hot chocolate or coffee to a few Salvation Army bell ringers. Let them know that even in the mundane, this season is about spreading the joy of Christ.

Children's Corner:

Joy = trusting God no matter what happens! Make the funniest face you can think of! What is a face you make when you are really happy? What is a face you make when you are really sad or scared? What is the face you make when you think about Jesus? How is that like joy?