

12.21.25 ~ Advent 3 & 4 JOY & LOVE

“Loving & Joyful Anticipation!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

SILENT WORDS OF JOY – please read silently both passages, then we will respond together at my prompting.

Isaiah 35:1-10 ^{ESV}

¹ The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;

² it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!

Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.

It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the Lord shall return

and come to Zion with singing;
 everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
 they shall obtain gladness and joy,
 and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Luke 1:46-55 ^{NIV}

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”

Leader: These Are the Words of Pure Joy.

People: Thanks be to God!

SPOKEN WORDS OF LOVE – Pam read aloud

Isaiah 7:10-16 ^{ESV}

¹⁰ Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” ¹³ And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

Matthew 1:18-25 ^{NIV}

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the

law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Leader: These Are the Words of Faithful Love.

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

God, you are the Lord of Joy and Love. We come to worship today on this last week of Advent in anticipation of the joy and love that Jesus the Messiah will bring! We know that our human hearts and minds are distracted by many things other than Advent and our relationship with you. However, as we worship and study your Scripture today and each day leading up to the birth of Jesus, we surrender to the hope, peace, joy, and love that you bring to us every day if we are open to it. Let us prepare to receive you and experience Christmas in a fresh new way. We cannot do this alone, so thank you for your presence and guidance in the season. Please speak through this message and messenger to seek your love and joy illuminating the spirit of Christmas! In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Merry almost Christmas! Thank you for your patience with the weather and ice last week. It was very hard to cancel an Advent service, but we did the right thing for everyone’s safety. Please read my Advent insert about Love to learn more of that decision. Also, thank you to those of you who supported the Sopranessence Annual Holiday Concert! It was exciting to recognize them for various grants received this year acknowledging their 10th Anniversary as an ensemble. Retired Supervisor Penny Gross presented a symbolic grant check and others in the Fairfax and Annandale Arts Scene were present to join the Christmas fun. Events

are one way we fulfill the Mission Center vision in this sacred yet accessible space. Please start thinking of someone you'd like to invite to our annual Christmas Eve Candlelight and Communion service at 2 pm, Wednesday, Christmas Eve day. David has recruited singers and instrumentalists, so it will be a beautiful service of sacred music, Scripture, and Carols. And after worship today, please go to the gym to see the beautiful quilts and their craftsmanship.; they are for sale as part of a Food Mission fundraiser. **Or** see the announcement inserts in the bulletin about other ways to give to them or to ACCA or to the church for general budget purposes. I know you'll prayerfully consider all the opportunities in this season of giving.

Do you remember your childhood Christmas seasons? Anticipating Santa Claus and opening gifts from parents, relatives, and friends? It was almost unbearable to wait during those weeks and days before Christmas! My mom never outgrew that excitement! So much so that my stepdad created harmless traps around her gifts so that he could tell if she had tried to open or shake them trying to figure them out before Christmas!

As I was pondering two weeks of "Loving and Joyful Anticipation," those memories came to mind. Children and some adults find waiting for any gifts hard to bear, especially when one knows the waiting leads to feelings of joy and delight. We want it now! That must have been how the people of Zion felt going home after exile in Isaiah 35 and how Mary must have felt expecting Jesus, a holy and divinely conceived baby. These gifts of safe reunion and a miraculous birth were unimaginably life changing! Even though Christmas gifts are often material things, I suggest that every young child feels a similar excitement and anticipation

about the gifts he or she wants for Christmas! They imagine these gifts will change their lives for the better, but we know that only Jesus' love can do that.

Some might say that Isaiah chapter 34 is a harsh prophecy and warning about God's judgment of his people but chapter 35 for last Sunday and today's Isaiah 7 are about God's **promised restoration**. We read how the deserts will bloom again to bear fruit; the feeble or differently abled will walk again; God will deliver his people; a son named Immanuel will be born; and through these miracles, all will see God's glory! What a message that the blind will see, the deaf will hear, and the injured will be healed from their infirmities. Pilgrims would be able to travel again on smooth roadways through mountains and obstacles back to Jerusalem, their home. The prophet Isaiah speaks God's Advent words of hope and peace that this redemption will bring unbelievable joy! Does Advent remind you of that message? Not just Advent. Every time we observe communion, we should be reminded that Christ's gift of eternal life is ours because of his sacrifice on the cross.

So, in week two of Advent, we heard John the Baptist's similar message about the Messiah coming: "But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11 ^{NIV}.)" Imagine, as we read in Luke 1 how Mary must have felt as she learned of her calling from the angel Gabriel and accepts her new role as mother of the long-awaited Messiah. The *Magnificat* and our anthem are responses to the situation, her surrender to God's will for her life, the ties to Abraham, and the fulfillment of her people's history. In her visit to Elizabeth, John and

Jesus jumped for joy even in the womb as they felt each other's presence. No one knew the terrible yet necessary fate of the coming baby Jesus. His incarnation and yes, even the crucifixion and resurrection were a continuation of God's immense love for his people and for us today.

Let's talk about Joseph's role in all this. We often don't hear much about him! Matthew's gospel reminds us that Jesus was born "of Mary." We must read these scriptures in light of Hebrew marriage laws where parents arranged contracts and required one year of betrothal to prove the bride's purity before the couple ever lived together or consummated the marriage. Mary and Joseph were in this one-year waiting period when Mary's pregnancy was revealed. Joseph expressed his love by choosing not to shame her by a public scandal and decided at first to quietly divorce her to spare her life. Punishment for infidelity was stoning and death. But . . .

In a dream, an unnamed angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and explained that the baby was conceived not from another man's sin, but from the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit! Mary will give birth to a son who will save God's people from their sin; he was told that this was to fulfill the prophecies (i.e. there are well over 100 Messianic prophecies in Isaiah alone). So, Joseph woke up and obeyed God's command to take Mary home as his wife and to name the child "Jesus," the Greek form of Joshua, or in Hebrew *Yeshua*, which means "the Lord saves." According to the betrothal laws, he maintained the year sexually apart from Mary but cared and provided for her needs. They became true husband and wife **after** Jesus was born. Joseph's extreme demonstration of love was both spiritual and emotional for he loved God, adored Mary, and lovingly

anticipated this amazing son who would become Joseph's carpenter apprentice and more importantly, was born to save the world! Joseph defied their customs to please God because he was sure of his role and new destiny to raise God's son, Jesus. Taking Mary as his wife despite the circumstances was a tangible thing he could do to express his Godly faith, hope, peace, joy, and love. How are we expressing our love this season and throughout the year? It is only a few more days until Christmas Eve, so we will keep watch for the birth of Jesus. See you Wednesday at 2 pm. Amen! ||

Pray with me now: Joyful and loving God, we pray for a heart and soul of readiness. Help us to digest these words and remember them so that we strengthen our relationship with you and your son Jesus. Guide us in our various holiday celebrations and conversations. Help us to share our stories of love where we see Christ at work. Make us spiritually prosperous this season as we ask you to fill this sanctuary with those seeking your presence. And keep us all safe and healthy in the many travels and celebrations we enjoy. In the holy name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.