

Sunday, December 11, 2022 Advent 3

“Know Jesus Know Joy-No Jesus No Joy”

Isaiah 35:1-10 James 5:7-10 Matthew 11:2-11

This is pink candle day—the Third Sunday of Advent and it is the day to rejoice to receive and experience Jesus joy! How joyful are you and from where does joy come? Maybe we need to define it first—“Delight or gladness; to extend favour; properly the awareness of God’s grace and favour or the recognition of grace.” It is a gift of the Spirit of God and comes to you because of God’s love for us all. Or maybe it is something experienced that goes beyond ourselves.

An old story tells that one day, a countryman knocked hard on a monastery door. When the monk tending the gates opened up, he was given a magnificent bunch of grapes.

“Brother, these are the finest my vineyard has produced. I’ve come to bear them as a gift.”

The monk replied, “Thank you! I will take them to the Abbot immediately, he’ll be delighted with this offering.”

The countryman retorted, “No! I brought them for you. For whenever I knock on the door, it is you opens it. When I needed help because the crop was destroyed by drought, you gave me a piece of bread and a cup of wine every day.”

The monk held the grapes and spent the entire morning admiring it. And decided to deliver the gift to the Abbot, who had always encouraged him with words of wisdom.

The Abbot was very pleased with the grapes, but he recalled that there was a sick brother in the monastery, and thought: I’ll give him the grapes. Who knows, they may bring some joy to his life. And that is what he did. But the grapes didn’t stay in the sick monk’s room for long.

The sick monk reflected, “The cook has looked after me for so long, feeding me only the best meals. I’m sure he will enjoy these.”

The cook was amazed at the beauty of the grapes. So perfect that no one would appreciate them more than the sexton; many at the monastery considered him a holy man, he would be best qualified to value this marvel of nature.

The sexton, in turn, gave the grapes as a gift to the youngest novice, that he might understand that the work of God is in the smallest details of Creation.

When the novice received them, he remembered the first time he came to the monastery, and of the person who had opened the gates for him; it was that gesture which allowed him to be among this community of people who knew how to value the wonders of life. And so, just before nightfall, he took the grapes to the monk at the gates.

“Eat and enjoy them, for you spend most of your time alone here, and these grapes will make you very happy.”

The monk seeing the grapes which he had first received from the countryman understood that the gift had been truly destined for him, and relished each of the grapes and expended joy before falling into a pleasant sleep.

Thus the circle was closed; the circle of happiness and joy, which always shines brightly around generous people.

Just who experienced joy in this story? How was joy expressed? Joy of giving! If you give something good, it will circulate and you will get some joy! But what is this joy we seek as we prepare and do the ‘ings’ of advent? What are some of the things that are bringing you joy? When a baby laughs it is considered joyful, even though the baby does nothing to make others happier- it just happens. But when a baby actually reaches out and grabs a finger with their entire hand it is another moment of joy- a contact and feeling between human beings that for many is difficult to articulate or describe perfectly.

Isaiah describes the everlasting joy that will be experienced by those who know what joy is. What is the biblical definition of joy? IT is the feeling of good pleasure and happiness that is dependent on who Jesus is rather than on who we are or what is happening around us. Joy comes from the Spirit abides in God’s presence and from hope in his word. It is simply knowing Jesus and rejoicing in him.

Isaiah 35 describes the future when the wilderness which was once a place of wandering and will be a raised road. When this occurs it will be safe and those who have been reconciled with God will be able to walk on it. They will experience joy, not bounded by time. And this is the kind of joy we want and can have because of the One Isaiah called “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” As we reflect on the Advent of our joy what we are focusing on is not only God’s coming in Christ, but also as our coming home to God’s embrace love and reconciliation made new. This is what knowing Jesus is about. Because if we don’t know Jesus, our faith teaches us that we will not have joy. But if we know who Jesus is in

our hearts, we will leap and shout and sing. And together we walk this journey of life and eventually safely home to heaven.

The Advent of our Joy is the coming of Jesus to us. We need to understand this in a new way. Jesus is not just a baby but he is the Incarnation of God himself come to live on earth. The Son of God took on human nature. His goal was to save real people and to do this he moved into human nature itself and became the Word made flesh. He breathed like we do; he ate and drank of the food provided to him by his parents and then as he learned the way of the world by his working hands as well. He was born into human history and this is a known fact- Jesus of Nazareth existed. God invested himself into the world through the birth of Jesus as an infant boy. God set in motion the wonder of salvation and reconciliation by having Jesus born of a human mother. And remember what occurred when Mary met Elizabeth they were filled with joy as they each carried a baby that would bring about change to the world. Jesus and John the Baptist were the ones who grew up and took on the roles as God had deemed for them.

John went ahead of Jesus to prepare the people. John was jailed for his message of Jesus as Messiah. And so when Jesus was asked, “are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?” Jesus knew that they had to tell John the Baptist that he Jesus was ready to begin what God had prepared him to do.

There was much joy when Jesus was born. The angels sang songs of wonder startling the shepherds. The star shone brightly in the night sky so that many saw it very far away. The shepherds went running to the stable where Jesus was laying in a feed trough. Yet they knew who he was. They knew him to be the Messiah; they left that bar, filled with a deep emotion of hope, peace and love. There was a spring in their steps- they had seen the Promised Child of God; They had see Jesus .

As we gather today here in person or wherever you are right now- we come together to look into that manger again. And prayerfully and hopefully you are experiencing the joy of Jesus because you know him as your Saviour. You know him as the one who changed your life. But maybe you are seeking him to be the one you talk with and can grow in faith and love. You are the one the Spirit whom is touching, and now is the moment when you say yes to Jesus.

In a few minutes we will share together in the sacrament of Holy Communion, following the instruction of Jesus- to do so in remembering him. Today we are filled with joy because the celebration of Christ's incarnation, that is his coming to the human world as a baby will be soon here. By changing the course of world history through his actions, teachings, life, death and resurrection Jesus taught us how to live and love and to do so with joy. When we eat and drink the bread and juice we are remembering the sacrifice he gave of himself for our sake; and in fulfilling his purpose as our human companion and friend. Let us rejoice in knowing Jesus because there is not greater joy, that experiencing the joy of the Lord!

PRAYER

Holy God bless us as we experience joy this day—remind us of the joy of Mary and how we experience this blissful emotion if we believe and have faith in Jesus our Saviour. The advent of Jesus is our joy. Enable us to prepare with open hearts and minds. We ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.