

Christmas Devotional: Dec. 1-7, 2019

Joy To The World

Joy to the World, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King.

"... for the joy of the Lord is your strength." -Nehemiah 8:10 NIV

Isaac Watts wrote "Joy to the World" in 1719. Since then, every Christmas season, carolers cast those words into the air like a lifeline out into the ocean of humanity. And every "fish" surely finds something inviting and worth nibbling at. The thrill of hope within the message spools out to touch a weary world with anticipation of tasting something really good!

Joy came to the world because God our great Creator loved His creation so much that He sent His Son to reveal His story, and so that over time, His character and ultimate good will toward mankind would be recognized. The impact on earth of Christ's birth will never diminish despite enemies' attempts to stop it. John 21:25 says that the world would not be able to contain the books that could be written about what the Lord did while on earth. Since then many more testimonies of His transforming love have been and will be written.

Nehemiah 8 records that Nehemiah, the leaders and the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with great joy, after sharing God's Word. Rejoice in God's Word and thoughts of the Savior's birth, His purpose and His inheritance.

Questions:

- What do you plan on rejoicing about during this Christmas season?

Angels We Have Heard On High

Angels we have on heard high
Sweetly singing ore the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains
Gloria in Excelsis Deo

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. -Luke 2:14 KJV

What gives you awe? What things cause you to become speechless when you see them? Is it the sight of a family member you haven't seen in years? Is it visiting a majestic place like a mountain or a historical place like the ancient pyramids of Egypt? The night Christ was born was the most monumental and awe-inspiring event that as ever occurred in human history as God sent His one and only Son to earth so that we could ultimately have eternal life. There has not been an event in history before or after Christ's birth that resulted in such celebration that the angels themselves made their physical presence known and their voices heard in song. Can you imagine how the shepherds' jaws must have dropped at the site and sounds of the angels? That moment was so majestic that we probably cannot fully comprehend what it was like because honestly, none of us have encountered such a sight.

It seems like people tend to have fewer experiences these days of complete awe. Technology has brought so much of the world to our living rooms and fingertips that we can see anything we want and feel like we are at anyplace we want to be. Unfortunately, most of us probably have fewer awe-inspiring moments with God like we should. Our relationship with Him often becomes too comfortable and even ordinary. This Christmas, make an attempt to regain those awe-inspiring moments with God. Strive to make your relationship with Him something so inspiring that it causes you to rejoice like the angels did. Don't let your relationship with Him be ordinary, but rather make it extraordinary.

Questions:

- Describe some of the awe-inspiring moments you've had with God. How have these moments impacted you?
- What changes do you need to make in your life so that you can start having more awe-inspiring moments with God?

Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas

Have yourself a merry little Christmas, Let your heart be light.
From now on, our troubles will be out of sight.

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." -Luke 10:41-42 NIV

Christmas can seem like a rat race at times. There is all of the hectic last minute shopping at crowded malls while struggling to find the perfect gift for someone, the decorating the house (including checking every single bulb on the strand of lights to find the one at the very end that shorted out the rest), wrapping present after present after present, or preparing for the family to come and take over the house for the day. It is easy to get lost in the busyness of Christmas, and to miss the things that are really important.

We see this happen in the book of Luke, when Jesus goes to eat in the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha. Martha spends her time running around cooking, serving dinner, and cleaning, which are very good things, but are busy things. Meanwhile, Mary sits in the company of Jesus. When Martha asks Jesus to tell her to work too, He tells her that, "Mary has chosen what is better."

Jesus is trying to tell us to live in the moment. It is great that you are willing to be like Martha, and make sure that all of the popcorn is strung up, but it is not worth missing the opportunity to have a real conversation with a family member you don't see often, or when your child's face lights up because Santa indeed got that letter and delivered exactly what they asked for. It is not about all that we have to do, the list of things we have check off, but it is all about the moment.

This year, don't miss out on what is better. Take the opportunity to enjoy the time you have with friends and family. Take time not to worry about the things you have to do, but to enjoy the people you get to be with. Be present where you are, because that is what is better, and have yourself a merry little Christmas.

Questions:

- What are some things you need to take off the list to make yourself become more like Mary?
- What are the better things that you are chose to be a part of this Christmas?

I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

“God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.”

The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace. - Psalm 29:11 NIV

Who is God to you? Is he your protector? Your provider? This Christmas Season, have you allowed him to be your peace?

It can be easy to view God simply as a friend to go to in times of trouble or a magic genie that grants all of your prayers. But God is so much more than that, and the blessings he wants to give to you are endless! He offers so many wonderful things—completely free of charge—including hope, joy, and peace for your heart. God wants nothing but the best for you.

Although your circumstances may be difficult, or hard to understand at times, that doesn't mean that God isn't there. He cares about you and loves with a giant-sized love, and he's waiting for you to let Him be your peace. So this Christmas, as you think about all the gifts you need to buy, and your never-ending to-do list, don't forget to stop and remember that only God can provide you with the unwavering quiet strength that comes from his peace.

Questions:

- In what ways do you find peace and comfort in God?
- What difficult circumstances are you currently dealing with that you need God's peace in helping you endure?

It Came Upon A Midnight Clear

When the new heaven and earth shall own the Prince of Peace, their King,
And the whole world send back the song which now the angels sing.

"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"

Revelation 21:3-4 NIV

When the angels first sang about peace on Earth and goodwill to all men, the shepherds must have wondered what was going on. They certainly didn't hear angelic choirs everyday, and First Century Palestine was hardly a peaceful place. The streets buzzed with rumours of revolution and the tension often boiled over into violence. Society was split along lines of gender, race, wealth and religion, and the shepherds themselves were only a few rungs above beggars on the social ladder. For some of us, Christmas itself is a time to be with friends and family, but for others it reminds us that we are alone or separated from loved ones. Two thousand years later, we seem to be as far as ever from Heaven on Earth.

Many people in the First Century were expecting a quick fix for the world's problems, and of course that didn't happen. It still hasn't happened. But Christmas reminds us of God's promise to bring in a kingdom where wars, injustice and even death will be a thing of the past, and where we will live together with God. That's our hope. God does have a plan. The best really is to come.

In the meantime, God continues to show his love to us in so many ways. He provides for our needs. He answers our prayers. He invites us to start living today like citizens of the kingdom that has not yet been fully revealed. We can love one another as Christ loved us here and now. We can show his compassion and his unconditional acceptance to others today. We can experience a foretaste of the new Heaven and Earth right now. We can share that experience with others. And we can do all this in the knowledge that God's Kingdom will prevail and that the whole of creation will one day see the truth that those shepherds heard on a remote, Palestinian hillside.

Questions:

- What one thing could you change to give those around you a foretaste of God's Kingdom of peace?

Mary Did You Know

Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your Baby Boy has come to make you new?
This Child that you delivered will soon deliver you.

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."

Luke 1:38 NLT

Have you ever listened to the song Mary, Did You Know? This touching song has been played for well over three decades during the Christmas season. The lyrics are beautifully written and contain powerful phrases like Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand and that This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you. It's a stirring line of questions by the songwriter that cause listeners to stand in amazement at the power of our God.

We really don't know much about Mary except that she was a virgin and probably in her early teens. According to Luke 1:28, we know that she was "highly favored" and that "the Lord was with her". Even without a stunning resume, God used her. Sweet, little Mary who kept to herself and wasn't a big "play maker" was invited by the Creator of the universe to change the world.

Many think the reason He chose her is because of her willingness. Upon hearing how this would play out in her life, Mary's response was, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." (Luke 1:38)

Mary simply said yes to her Lord with no conditions whatsoever.

Where are you in your life right now? How much of "you" have you truly surrendered? Are you living the truth that "your life is not your own" and that you've been "brought with a price"? Is there something that you are missing out on because you won't let Him lead?

We have a Messiah. His name is Jesus. He is the Savior of the world. He walked on water without a single bit of effort. He came and died to make us new. He gave sight to a blind man with some dirt and saliva. He woke up from a deep sleep and calmed a raging storm with his human hand. He fed over 5,000 people with a tiny bit of bread and fish. He does the miraculous.

And He has amazing plans for your life.

Questions:

- What have you not surrendered to God?
- What is keeping you from doing so?

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel,
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

"...and they will call him Immanuel," which means "God with us."

Matthew 1:23 NIV84

Time after time, the Israelites found themselves separated from God - always by their own doing. And God would eventually deliver them, only to be betrayed by His chosen people again. So we find two constant themes in the Old Testament:

- The Israelites, no matter how hard they tried, were unfaithful God
- God remained faithful and fulfilled the promises He made to them

Through His prophets, God made many promises. Isaiah 7:14 says, *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and you shall call his name Emmanuel."* The name Emmanuel translates as "God with us." It's a remarkable promise - the Ultimate Being and Creator of the Universe promising to make Himself physically present with the people who have proven themselves unworthy.

In one of the most somber Christmas song, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel", there is an embraced tension within Israel. They are in exile, separated from God yet again. With a sober perspective, they choose to rejoice in the promise God has made to them. With nothing else to cling to, in the midst of desperation and loneliness, they recall and proclaim the promise that God would be with them - knowing that, in spite of their unfaithfulness, God is faithful to His promises.

No one could have expected a baby in a manger to be the start of God's perfect plan to be "with us." And yet, that is exactly how God fulfilled His promise.

Are you waiting for God to come through on a promise He has made? Do you feel a sense of loneliness or exile? Rejoice! Rejoice! Through Christ, God has made Himself present to us. His faithfulness is greater than our failure. And His presence is all the reason we need to, once more, rejoice!

Questions:

- Since God is "Emmanuel," how is God *with you* this holiday season?