

First  Lutheran  
CHURCH

# Joy <sup>to</sup> the World

Advent Sermon Series Resource



## Advent Small Group Guides 2024

# Joy <sup>to</sup> the World

### **Introduction**

Join us as we prepare our hearts to fully experience and share the joy of Christmas. The well-known Christmas hymn begins, "Joy to the world the Lord has come!" While joy is in the air during the Christmas season, joy can feel elusive when facing difficult situations.

This Advent we will rehearse once again the story that is the source of joy to the world, as well as joy to us when we need it most. As we walk through the first few chapters of Luke's Christmas story, we will highlight different moments when joy was found in unexpected or challenging circumstances.

- December 1, 2024 - Joy in Disappointment
- December 8, 2024 - Joy in Surrender
- December 15, 2024 - Joy in Community
- December 22, 2024 - Joy in Song

*Format designed, key ideas and week 1 written by Pastor PJ Malin.*

*Weeks 2, 3 and 4 compiled by Pam Miller.*

**December 1, 2024**  
***Joy in Disappointment***

**Opening Prayer:**

“Dear Lord, we thank You for gathering us together. We ask that You open our hearts to hear Your Word and help us to see how Your plans are always good, even when we face disappointment. Fill us with Your joy, and may we trust in Your timing as we seek You in all things. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

**Ice Breaker Question:**

What is something you waited a long time for that eventually brought you joy? How did you feel during the waiting?

**Main Reading:**

Luke 1:5-25 - The announcement of John the Baptist’s birth to Zechariah and Elizabeth

**Background on the Bible Passage:**

Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous and blameless before God, but they lived with deep disappointment—Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in age. In their culture, being childless was considered a disgrace, and they likely carried the burden of this shame for many years. Yet, even in their old age, God had a plan for them. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah while he was serving in the temple, announcing that Elizabeth would bear a son, John, who would prepare the way for the Lord. Zechariah initially doubted this promise, but God’s word came to pass. The joy that followed was not only for them but for the entire world as John became the forerunner of Christ. This story reminds us that even in disappointment, God is at work, and God’s plans often bring unexpected joy when we least expect it.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What stood out to you from the Scripture and sermon this week?
2. How do you think Zechariah and Elizabeth felt during their years of waiting and disappointment? How does the cultural context of their time add to their burden?
3. When Zechariah doubted Gabriel’s message, he was rendered silent. How can times of silence in our lives deepen our faith or prepare us for what God has in store?
4. God chose to bless Zechariah and Elizabeth with a child in their old age. What does this tell us about God’s timing and how it challenges our expectations of success and fulfillment?
5. How can we find joy, as Zechariah and Elizabeth eventually did, even when God’s plans don’t unfold in the way or timing we expect?

**Application Question:**

Is there an area in your life where you’ve experienced disappointment and are struggling to see God’s plan? How can you find joy in trusting God’s timing in that situation?

**Highs and Lows Prayer:** Take time to share the highs and lows of the past week with the group. After sharing, pray for each other, asking God to help find joy in all circumstances, especially in moments of disappointment or waiting. Ask God for a deeper trust in God’s timing and God’s perfect plan.

**December 8, 2024**  
***Joy in Surrender***

**Opening Prayer:**

"Dear Lord, we thank You for gathering us together. We ask that You open our hearts to hear Your Word and help us to see how Your plans are always good, even when we face disappointment. Fill us with Your joy, and may we trust in Your timing as we seek You in all things. In Jesus' name, Amen."

**Ice Breaker Question:**

What is something you surrendered to God with a yes, despite the social consequences, that eventually brought you joy? How did you feel during the process of surrender and when you finally gave it over to God?

**Main Reading:**

Luke 1:26-38 - Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel

**Background on the Bible Passage:**

Mary was a poor, unimportant Jewish girl from Nazareth, living a simple life of faith, engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. Despite her simple life she was chosen to bear the Son of God. When the angel Gabriel brings her this news, Mary wonders how this could possibly happen. With joy and faith, she accepts the words of Gabriel despite the uncertainty and potential social consequences. She is willing to surrender her fear and plans to God's will and purpose. Surrendering to God's will is seen as countercultural but leads to deep joy. God provides strength and joy when we are willing to surrender our own understanding and trust in God.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What stood out to you from the scripture and sermon this week?
2. How do you think Mary felt about hearing that she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit, a supernatural pregnancy? How would you react?
3. What do you think would be the hardest thing to believe about what the angel Gabriel said? Why would it be hard to say yes?
4. What does this tell you about God's plans for Jesus' arrival into this world?
5. How can you surrender control, trust God, and find joy?

**Application Question:**

Is there an area in your life where you are struggling to surrender control and trust God? How can you find joy in trusting God's plan?

**Highs and Lows Prayer:**

Take time to share the highs and lows of the past week with the group. After sharing, pray for each other, asking God to help find joy in all circumstances, especially in moments of surrender. Ask God for a deeper trust in God's timing and God's perfect plan.

**December 15, 2024**  
***Joy in Community***

**Opening Prayer:**

"Dear Lord, we thank You for gathering us together. We ask that You open our hearts to hear Your Word and help us to see how Your plans are always good, even when we face disappointment. Fill us with Your joy, and may we trust in Your timing as we seek You in all things. In Jesus' name, Amen."

**Ice Breaker Question:**

Who would you go to see or call first if you had exciting news to share? What makes them a person you can share your most intimate thoughts and feelings with?

**Main Reading:**

Luke 1:39-45 (Mary Visits Elizabeth)

**Background on the Bible Passage:**

Mary finds joy and strength in visiting Elizabeth, her cousin, who shares in the miracle of God's plan. When Mary greets Elizabeth, Elizabeth feels her baby move and is filled with the Holy Spirit. She says, "You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear!". Mary responds, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior".

They delight in the joy of sharing their excitement, wonder and nervousness of their pregnancies. The importance of community encourages and strengthens their faith and amplifies their joy. In a world that can feel isolating, joy is often found in the presence and encouragement of others who share our faith journey. Mary and Elizabeth's encounter highlights the joy that comes from sharing God's work in our lives with others.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What stood out to you from the scripture and sermon this week?
2. Why do you think Mary chose Elizabeth to share her news with?
3. Elizabeth's baby leaped when he heard Mary's voice. Why do you think there was a connection with Elizabeth's baby and Mary? How is this encouraging to Mary?
4. What does this encounter tell you about how God provides others in our lives to walk with us and share our faith journey with?
5. How can you find joy by sharing how God is working in your life?

**Application Question:**

We are created to be in relationship. How can you engage with others to share and grow your faith while encouraging them?

**Highs and Lows Prayer:**

Take time to share the highs and lows of the past week with the group. After sharing, pray for each other, asking God to help find joy in all circumstances, especially in sharing with others how God is working in you. Ask God for a deeper trust in God's timing and God's perfect plan.

**December 22, 2024**

## ***Joy in Song***

### **Opening Prayer:**

"Dear Lord, we thank You for gathering us together. We ask that You open our hearts to hear Your Word and help us to see how Your plans are always good, even when we face disappointment. Fill us with Your joy, and may we trust in Your timing as we seek You in all things. In Jesus' name, Amen."

### **Ice Breaker Question:**

What songs about God and God's promises touch your heart? What words and/or phrases bring out feelings and what feelings do they bring out?

### **Main Reading:**

Luke 1:46-55 (Mary's Song)

### **Background on the Bible Passage:**

In ancient Jewish culture, songs and psalms were both personal and corporate expressions of faith. Mary's song begins with a personal declaration of joy. "My soul magnifies the Lord," reflecting her deep, personal connection with God. Mary celebrates God's mighty deeds and His role in her life. Her song follows the tradition of other women such as Miriam (Exodus) where she wrote "Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted." These songs recount God's mighty acts, acknowledging God's power and intervention. Mary's song reflects the reversal themes found in Jewish prophetic literature, such as in the book of Isaiah, which speaks of God lifting the humble and reversing worldly injustices. Mary's song highlights how God's kingdom operates differently from worldly expectations. The fulfillment of promises is a significant theme in Jewish tradition, where God's faithfulness to God's promises of salvation is celebrated. Mary rejoices in the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. Her joy is a testament to the assurance that God's promises are true and reliable.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What stood out to you from the scripture and sermon this week?
2. How does Mary see herself in this song?
3. What attributes of Mary do you appreciate most?
4. What words in Mary's song describe how you feel about your spiritual life?
5. We can trust and rely on God's promises. What joy do you find in His promises?

### **Application Question:**

What words would your song to God include? How can you share with others the joy you have found in God's promises?

### **Highs and Lows Prayer:**

Take time to share the highs and lows of the past week with the group. After sharing, pray for each other, asking God to help find joy in God's promises and find ways to share these promises with others.

Join us for

# Christmas

## **Living Nativity**

Sunday, December 8 | 4:30-6:30pm

## **Christmas Family Music Class**

Friday, December 13 | 9:30am

## **Fireside Sing-A-Long**

Friday, December 13 | 6:00pm

## **Carols & Candles**

Saturday, December 21 | 5:00pm

## **Christmas Eve Worship**

Children's Service - 10:00am

Candlelight Services - 1:30pm | 4:00pm | 6:00pm

YouTube & Facebook Live - All Services

Radio - KXRA 100.3 FM - 7:00pm

TV - Public Access Channel 181 - 7:00pm

