

WONDERS IN THE WAITING: JOY!



Scripture:

Psalm 126

¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. ²Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” ³The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. ⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb. ⁵May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. ⁶Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

This is Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



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This is the Magnificat, otherwise known as “The hymn of the Virgin Mary.” The word, Magnificat is defined as “an utterance of praise.”

Mary found the God-given ability to be joyful and thankful for the very first event leading up to Christmas. Maybe that is why we

are joyful, too? In the midst of the chaos of this season we can all still find a moment of joy.

What brings you joy in Advent and Christmastime? I have a couple special Christmas decorations that remind me of happy times on the farm at Christmas. I loved decorating for Christmas in our home. Each year when I carefully unpack these three little

decorations and set them out on my kitchen table I feel a warm feeling of joy about the season.



SPECIAL MEMORIES CAN BRING JOY

Do you have some special things or memories that bring you joy this Advent?

In our Noon Hour of Prayer time last Friday I asked the group to share a special Christmas memory. One shared that when she was about nine years old she had given up on asking her parents for a kitty. She had begged and pleaded, but no kitty. Then on Christmas morning it was time to go to their stockings and see what was inside. Sitting inside in the top of her stocking was a little kitten all curled up. What a memorable Christmas that was for Ba Hoff!

Another said that her favorite Christmas memory was when she surprised her niece with a doll baby buggy that her parents had not been able to give her. The look of joy on her niece's face when she found the buggy with her name on it was such a gift to the giver, Helen MacKenzie, that Christmas.

I have a new Christmas tradition that gives me joy and this year it will give seventy families great joy: The Giving Tree Project.

THE JOY OF THE LORD

Giving and receiving provide us such great joy this time of year. Yet, the kind of joy we experience through suffering is abundantly powerful. Sounds strange? Oswald Chambers, in his devotional book, says that the source of abundant joy is God's love. He explains that the things we try to avoid in life: tribulation, suffering, and persecution are the very things that produce abundant joy in us.

Romans 8:37 says, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." So in all these trials and tribulations, not despite them, but in the midst of them, we find joy.

Oswald Chambers goes on to say, "We don't know the joy of the Lord in spite of tribulation but because of it."

Paul said in 2nd Corinthians, "I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation." Whether we experience daily events as terrifying or ordinary, nothing will separate us from the love of God. Nothing! Trusting that God's love is constant brings joy.

"THE NATIVITY"

That is the deep feeling Mary felt when she sang this Magnificat song. Despite the petrifying fear she must have felt at the news that she would conceive, she felt God's love in that news and understood it was all a blessing no matter the complications of it all.

This clip from the movie, "The Nativity" gives us a sense of what that moment might have been like for Mary when Gabriel gave her the confusing news that she was to give birth to the son of God. (The video was shown to the congregation.)

Pretty scary, yet she is able to sing such a magnificent song! Mary shows us how to be joyful in the midst of adversity. For nine months she has to wait for Gabriel's message to come to fruition. And in the meantime, she deals with the prospect of either being thrown

out of her family and rejected by Joseph her betrothed, or stoned to death for being pregnant before marriage.

A BLESSING IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

The Magnificat song Mary sings begins by recognizing that this event in her life is a blessing in the midst of chaos. Then she jumps to singing about the character of God who is blessing her. She says the God who blesses does so with mercy and strength. She commends God for satisfying the hungry, not just the physically hungry but also the spiritually hungry. A justice theme runs throughout her song, showing that God cares for the lowly, feeds the hungry and keeps his promises.

Abundant joy is only possible when there is true sharing and giving of grace and blessings for all, not just for the powerful and wealthy. That is clear in the Magnificat as well. Mary rejoices because God has chosen her, a lowly humble faithful girl to become the mother of God. God could have chosen a queen or an empress but God chose a faithful, simple girl who was betrothed to a man in the lineage of King David.

HENRY VAN DYKE

Joy in the midst of adversity is a theme in many of our hymns. The author of the text for our next hymn: Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee, understood the joy that comes out of adversity. Henry Van Dyke wrote the words to this hymn in 1907. Van Dyke was a Presbyterian minister and a professor of English literature at Princeton University. He chaired the committee that wrote our Presbyterian Book of Common Worship.

During WWI Pastor Van Dyke was a U.S. Navy Chaplain and he wrote this poem during the bleak days before the World War I. In it he asks God to “Melt the clouds of sin and sadness and drive the dark of doubt away.” But it ends with a Christian sense of ultimate hope predicting that we can be “victors in the midst of strife.”

JOY IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY

Mary was a victor in the midst of strife as was her husband Joseph. They both found the ability to find joy in the midst of adversity that included a rough journey to Bethlehem and giving birth in a stable! What a complicated gestational period!

I am thankful to find many role models who help us understand what joy in the midst of strife looks like.

A few weeks ago I showed you a video of Nick Vijucik who said, “People ask how I manage to be joyful despite having no arms and no legs. The quick answer is that I have a choice. I can be angry about not having limbs, or I can be thankful that I have a purpose. I chose gratitude.”

Terri Roberts is a new joyful inspiration I recently discovered. Terri is a cancer survivor and grandmother of ten who lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. As a motivational speaker she uses verses like this from the Bible as her guide: “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet, I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.” (Habbakuk 3: 17-18)

joythroughadversity.com

Terri Roberts has a website called joythroughadversity.com. She not only has had to struggle with breast cancer off and on over the past ten years, Terri’s son was the shooter who killed ten Amish girls in their school in Lancaster a few years ago.

Terri started writing and giving motivational speeches after she was

unexpectedly forgiven for her son's violence by the Amish community. Rather than having to move away from Lancaster, her family was embraced with love by the parents and relatives of the children her son murdered. The deepest joy we can feel comes through the act of forgiveness.

Terri's "Joy Through Adversity" talks have inspired thousands to not give up hope. Often during her presentations she shows the video of the song entitled *Blessings* by Laura Story. I think Mary the Mother of our Lord would have been comforted by this song, too, since being the mother of Jesus Christ was full of joyful blessing and adversity often at the same time. (A video was shown to the congregation.)

**We pray for blessings
We pray for peace
Comfort for family, protection while we
sleep**

**We pray for healing, for prosperity
We pray for Your mighty hand to ease
our suffering**

**All the while, You hear each spoken need
Yet love us way too much to give us lesser
things**

**We pray for wisdom
Your voice to hear
And we cry in anger when we cannot feel
You near**

**We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your
love**

**As if every promise from Your Word is
not enough**

**All the while, You hear each desperate
plea**

And long that we'd have faith to believe

**When friends betray us
When darkness seems to win
We know the pain reminds this heart
That this is not, this is not our home**

**Cause what if Your blessings come through
raindrops**

**What if Your healing comes through tears
And what if a thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know You're near
What if my greatest disappointments
Or the aching of this life
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this
world can't satisfy
And what if trials of this life
The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
Are Your mercies in disguise**

Benediction:

**As the body of Christ may we always
reflect the joy of Jesus Christ who
welcomes the least of these, the hungry,
the stranger, and the lowly into our
midst.**

**As it says in Hebrews, "For by so
doing we may be showing hospitality to
angels unawares."**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ, the love of God and the fellowship
of the Holy Spirit be with us now and
forevermore. Amen**



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