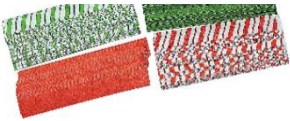




'Worship at home' Sunday December 17th 2023



Today is the **third Sunday in Advent**, and is sometimes known as **Gaudete Sunday**, *gaudete* being the latin word for "rejoice."
Today we make time to find the joy that can sneak in even amidst sadness, grief and pain.



You are invited to find some of **last year's Christmas cards**, or **coloured paper/card, scissors** and a **pen**, to use as an aid to prayer.

Opening

Holy God of Joy,
We rejoice in the reality of who you are.
We live within the joy of your love for us.
Our contentment comes and goes.
Our happiness ebbs and flows.
Our feelings depend upon our circumstances,
our physical health, our brain chemistry.
But our *joy* is deeply rooted
in our identity as your beloved children.
And we give you thanks. Amen.

~ Joanna Harader <http://spaciousfaith.com/>

Psalm 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and

we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

New International Version 1

The LORD

has done great things for us
and we are filled with

Joy

Psalm 126:3

This psalm expresses the joy of the Israelite people when they finally returned to their own land after captivity in Babylon. After years of pain, sorrow and uncertainty, their tears were turned to songs of joy. This psalm was written in Hebrew, the language of the ancient Israelites. Hebrew lacks the focus on time and tense that govern many other languages. When the people exclaimed “the Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy”, they may have been referring to great things that the Lord had done previously, celebrating what was happening in their lives at that time, as well as looking forward to great things to come. **When we live in God, the past grounds us into our future.** Our scripture stories of God’s saving actions for God’s people all through the ages remind us that God is now at work in our world, sustaining and redeeming us in love, and will continue to be so. **We believe that even when life feels hard, or the world seems lost, God is with us, God will turn our tears to joy and restore us to each other and to our earth.** In our time of advent waiting, we remember this and give thanks.

**Prayerfully think back over the events
of the past 12 months.**

What has given you joy?

What has made you weep?

How are these connected?

“Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the self-same well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be? The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain... When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight. Some of you say, “Joy is greater than sorrow,” and others say, “Nay, sorrow is the greater.” But I say unto you, they are inseparable.”

Kahlil Gibran: ‘The Prophet’ 1980 Pan Books Ltd, London 2

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. May

God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

New International Version

Reflect again on what brings you joy.

Is there a difference between joy and happiness?

"While happiness is dependent on external conditions, joy is "the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death - can take that love away."

Henri Nouwen

Rejoice!

Joy can be present even in the midst of sadness. Sometimes joy surprises us, turning up when we least expect it. At other

times, we find ourselves choosing an attitude of joy even in our hard times, and in our joy we find hope. In this letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul exhorts the community to "rejoice always". This is not always easy to do, when we are struggling with pain, grief and anxiety. We are encouraged to "pray continually", and it is in our praying that we can find hope and the strength to continue. We cannot always change a difficult situation, but we can sometimes change how we respond to our struggles, seeking to find joy in sadness, giving thanks in all circumstances, and trusting God who promises to be faithful.

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations

will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He

has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the

hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”

New International Version

This scripture passage is commonly called the *Magnificat*, after the Latin word for “magnify”. Mary praises God for God’s greatness, rejoicing in God’s saving actions in her life and in the world. It is a beautiful song of praise and joy.

Reflect on the emotions Mary may have felt on finding herself pregnant.

Joy

Uncertainty

Fear

Shame

Excitement

Hope

Anger

Disbelief

Sometimes joy is difficult to find in the complex emotions of our lives. As we approach this Christmas, some might be finding it difficult to see the joy in this season. The losses and stresses of this last year, or the uncertainties of the next, may be challenging and confronting to us. We remember that life is not all sorrow, just as it is not all joy. The truth of Christmas is not that life will be perfect; rather, the truth of Christmas is that when we have faith and follow God’s ways, God is with us, in our times of sorrow and in our times of rejoicing.



Prayer Response

Cut old Christmas cards or coloured paper or card into strips, around 2cm wide. Write the names of people, places or situations of people you would like to bring before God in prayer...include people who feel sad at this time of year. Loop the strips around each other and sticky tape them together in a paper chain, hang them around your house as Christmas decoration, and keep these people in your prayers during the remainder of this Advent season.



Closing Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances. Go with joy!