

Opening Carol:

“Angels We have Heard on High”

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains
Gloria, in excelsis Deo
Gloria, in excelsis Deo

Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing,
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo
Gloria, in excelsis Deo

We continue in this season of Advent anticipating Christ's coming to us as Christmas. The first week we lit the candle of HOPE and last week we lit the candle of PEACE. Today we light the candle of JOY.... remembering that we experience the joy of fulfillment and purpose we were created for as we daily live receiving and following the Christ born in Bethlehem.

(Three candles are lit.)

Luke 2:8-11:

“Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said, ‘Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord.’” The Lord's angel stood before them, the Lord's glory shone around them, and they were terrified. The angel said, ‘Don't be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you—wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David's city. He is Christ the Lord.’”

Prayer:

Loving God, we open ourselves to you, trusting that this is how you made us:
you created us for joy-filled hearts and lives.

Show us the creative power of hope. Teach us the peace that comes from justice.

Fill us with the kind of joy that cannot be contained but must be shared.

Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you, that we may walk in the light of Christ. Amen.

“The First Noel”

The First Noel, the angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as
they lay
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep
On a cold winter's night that was so deep
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel!

They looked up and saw a star
Shining in the East beyond them far
And to the earth it gave great light
And so it continued both day and night
Noel, Noel Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel!

Devotional:

“In the Gospel of John, Jesus sums up pretty much everything by saying, ‘These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full’ (John 15:11). He said it at the supper that he knew was the last he’d eat.

Happiness turns up more or less where you’d expect it to—a good marriage, a rewarding job, a pleasant vacation. Joy, on the other hand, is as notoriously unpredictable as the one who bequeaths it.” (From Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, pp. 57-58.)

“Sarah was never going to see ninety again, and Abraham had already hit one hundred, and when the angel told them that the stork was on its way at last, they both of them almost collapsed. Abraham laughed “till he fell on his face” (Genesis 17:17), and Sarah stood cackling behind the tent door so the angel wouldn’t think she was being rude as the tears streamed down her cheeks. When the baby finally came, they even called him “Laughter”—which is what Isaac means in Hebrew—because obviously no other name would do.... Sarah and her husband had had plenty of hard knocks in their time, and there were plenty more of them still to come, but at that moment when the angel told them they’d better start dipping into their old-age pensions for cash to build a nursery, the reason they laughed was that it suddenly dawned on them that the wildest dreams they’d ever had hadn’t been half wild enough.” (Excerpted from Frederick Buechner, *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who’s Who*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1979, pp. 172-173.)

Reflect or Discuss:

1. Recall (and share, if possible) a time when you felt almost ridiculously joyful. What made that time so joyful?
2. What are the things that most take away your joy in life?
3. How can the child born at Christmas give you a joy that runs deeper and more durably than just the outward circumstances that create happiness?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, what you began at Christmas is still going on around me and within me. Let your joy anchor me in hard times, and overflow from me to others at all times. Amen.

“Joy to the World”

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart, prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven
and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven
and nature sing

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and
plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the
sounding joy.