

Small group questions

1. How would you define joy?
2. What is different about joy for the Christian?
3. Did you celebrate Advent growing up? Do you have any traditions?
4. What stands out to you the most in the Christmas story found in the gospel of Luke?
5. Do you have a hard time finding joy? Why? Do you have a propensity toward negativity/critique? Why?
6. Have you ever been around someone that exudes joy? What's different about them?
7. What is significant about the shepherds being the ones told about the birth of Jesus?
8. What is significant about Simeon and Anna?
9. What are some tangible ways you can cultivate joy in your life?

Luke 2:8-20 ESV

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"^[d]

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

QUOTE: "Biblical joy is different than what most people think of as joy. It is not just a happy emotion that we either feel or don't feel, it is a state of being that finds its source in God. The Bible is clear that joy comes from God (Neh. 8:10 "The joy of the Lord is our strength), and our joy is a product of what God has done and continues to do. It is gladness and contentedness flowing out of the well-spring of God's faithfulness and mercy, quite independent of our circumstances."

"Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it...Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness" (Psalm 96:11-13).

"Sing for joy, O heavens! Rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on them in their suffering" (Isaiah 49:13).

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"Those who have been ransomed by the Lord...will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness" (Isaiah 35:10).

- *"Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines. Though the yield of the olive should fail...Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17-18).*

Quote: Henri Nouwen "Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day."

Quote: Richard Foster "The decision to set the mind on the higher things of life is an act of the will. That is why celebration is a discipline. It is not

something that falls on our heads. It is the result of a consciously chosen way of thinking and living.”

Luke 2:8-14 ESV “And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear (. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest , and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’”

Luke 2:25-32 ESV “Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

o Isaiah 60:1-5, 6b ESV:
“Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Lift up your eyes all around, and see;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from afar,
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and exult,
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.”

- QUOTE “The good news of the Savior’s birth came first to a most unlikely group of people. Shepherds were near the bottom of the social ladder. They were uneducated and unskilled, increasingly viewed in the post-New Testament era as dishonest, unreliable, unsavory characters, so much so that they were not allowed to testify in court. Because sheep required care seven days a week, shepherds were unable to fully comply with the man-made Sabbath regulations developed by the Pharisees. As a result, they were viewed as being in continual violation of the religious laws, and hence ceremonially unclean.” - John MacArthur
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 - Philippians 4:4-9. He writes:
 - “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

