

# Finding Joy in Present Times

Today we share how we can face any situation when we allow our hearts to be filled with joy in present times.

## Introduction

You have probably seen the word “joy” this Christmas season either as decorations, on Christmas cards, in song titles, or just spelled out on decorative signs. Christmas is known as the season of joy. Today we want to talk about joy.

In our world, it is difficult to find joy in present times. When we turn on the news or the radio, read headlines, or scroll through social media, joy is not as plentiful as disaster, violence, or discord.

Today, we celebrate the third week of Advent, the week of joy. At the beginning of this season, we talked about finding hope this Christmas. Last week we discovered that Jesus is our peace and we trust in him, his peace covers our hearts no matter what we are facing. For the next few moments, we are going to discuss finding joy this Christmas.

## Celebrations of Joy

The Biblical definition of joy is the contentment of knowing that God is in control. Joy is not an emotion but rather a state of well-being. It is the knowledge and action of putting complete trust in God’s goodness.

The Old Testament is full of stories about the Israelites celebrating the goodness of God with joy through festivals of eating, gift-giving, dancing, singing, and playing instruments. In each example, the festivals were not based on the nation’s emotions but rather on what God had done for them.

One example is found in the book of Ezra after Ezra read the Book of Law to the exiled Jews who had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. It was the first time they learned God’s intention for their lives. They turned from their wicked ways, repented to God, and God gave them favor with the king of Assyria.

Nehemiah had led them in one of the most advantageous building projects in history, the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls in just a few short months.

Let’s read this account in Ezra 6:19-22.

### Ezra 6:19-22

(19) On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover. (20) The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their relatives the priests and for themselves. (21) So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel. (22) For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the LORD had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.



These exiles celebrated for seven days the goodness of God. The Feast of Unleavened Bread starts with Passover and then celebrates how God delivered the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. This was a new beginning for the Israelites and a reason to celebrate. The exiles who had returned to Jerusalem after being taken into captivity were experiencing a new beginning with the walls of the city being rebuilt.

Joy comes when we think of how good God is to us. He is the reason for the celebration.

## The Shepherds

Let's look at another story of joy from the Christmas story, the perspective of the shepherds. These young men were low in society, not noticed, often overlooked, and even looked down upon as they smelled of the field and sheep. They didn't have the best manners and were not well-kept. Yet, they played an integral part in the birth of Jesus.

Let's begin reading their story in Luke 2:8-12

### Luke 2:8-12

(8) And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (9) An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (10) But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. (11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. (12) This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

These shepherds were minding their own business on a quiet night when suddenly a bright, shining angel appeared to them. I'm sure this angel lit up the entire area demanding everyone's attention. Once the shock wore off and they were no longer afraid, they could comprehend what the angel was telling them. This is what has prophesied hundreds of years earlier by Micah!

Micah 5:2 says:

### Micah 5:2

(2) "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

This Messiah that would bring good news to the world was finally born!

Not only that, they were told where to go to find him. God had chosen them to be the first visitors of his newborn son, what a privilege!

These lowly shepherds were some of the first humans to lay eyes on God's son, the Messiah, the Savior of the world!

Let's continue reading Luke 2:13-14.



Luke 2:13-14

(13) Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, (14) "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Now there is a great company of angels, an entire choir showed up to give God the glory and proclaim peace! I would imagine that these shepherds didn't move but were awestruck at the sight and the sound.

We do not know how long this angelic encounter lasted, but we do know they were given detailed instructions and the shepherds left right away.

Luke 2:15-20 explains their encounter.

Luke 2:15-20

(15) When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (16) So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (17) When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, (18) and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (19) But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (20) The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The shepherds didn't waste any time leaving their flocks and going to find the baby. They had responsibilities and a livelihood that they decided to put on hold to be obedient to the Lord. The joy that consumed them, the hope that filled them, and the anticipation of what was in store for them is what drove them.

What a privilege and an honor to be chosen by God to witness and proclaim such an event! When joy takes over, we are in awe of the goodness of God. They were determined to follow the Lord's leading and were changed forever because of their obedience.

### Choosing Joy

When God calls us to do something, we have one of two options. We can make excuses, or we can go. The shepherds chose the latter.

Joy is so much more than an emotion. Joy fills us, drives us, and gives us peace. Although we may be going through difficult times, we can still choose joy.

In the book of Philippians, we learn about rejoicing and having joy even when things are not easy.

Philippians 4:4-7 says:

Philippians 4:4-7

(4) Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (5) Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. (6) Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and



petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (7) And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

No matter what our circumstances might be, we are to be joyful always or rejoice always. We do this by letting our gentleness be known and not being anxious about anything. Instead, we are to bring every situation to God in prayer and by doing we will receive peace. This is a peace that we cannot comprehend because it fills our hearts and our minds.

### Conclusion

Peace and joy, joy and peace. These two go hand-in-hand. We can face any situation when we allow our hearts to be filled with joy then we will experience peace.

Romans 15:13 tells us:

Romans 15:13

(13) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This Christmas, you can have joy. Joy comes to those who have said “yes” to Jesus. It is a gift from God through the Holy Spirit that fills the believer’s hearts. No matter what your current circumstances are, you can experience joy because of God’s goodness and what Jesus has accomplished on the cross.

