



Week 15: Joy and Love

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

John 1:14

The Christmas story is full of joy connected to the birth of Jesus Christ and the good news of salvation.

Elizabeth's joy: Elizabeth said that Mary's baby "leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:44).

The angel's message: The angel announced to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring to you good tidings of great joy, which shall be for all the people" (Luke 2:10).

The wise men's reaction: The wise men "rejoiced with exceeding great joy" when they saw the star (Matthew 2:10).

Mary's joy: Mary's soul rejoiced in God her Savior when she learned she would bear the Christ.

Looking at this consistent thread through the biblical accounts of Jesus' birth, it seems clear and obvious why Luke 1:14 says, "...many will rejoice at his birth." Joy is at the center of this whole story. The joy of Christmas is rooted in the idea that God has now come close—in the person of Jesus—to save the whole world. The birth of Jesus broke the oppression of sin, and then his sacrificial death and resurrection fulfilled prophecies about the Messiah.

Advent is a season for us to choose the joyful anticipation of Christ's coming, reminding us of the profound and others-oriented love God has for humanity (Philippians 2). Let's cultivate joy in our hearts, reflecting on the promises of Christmas we can often overlook.

In a practical sense, gratitude is one of the practices that can cultivate joy. Coach Steve Johnson used to say, "A grateful heart is a happy heart." As we prepare for Christmas, let's practice gratitude—embracing the joy that arises from filling our minds and hearts with the many things for which we can be grateful.

continued below...

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

For you

1. On a scale of 1-10, how natural is it for you to “choose joy”? Are you naturally more of a “glass is half empty” or a “glass is half full” sort of person? Knowing who you are and how you’re wired, how can you actively cultivate joy?
2. What brings you the most joy during the Advent season?
3. How can you experience and express love more fully this month?
4. In what ways can you spread joy to those who may be struggling?
5. A Spiritual Practice to try: Breath Prayers
 - a. Sit quietly and comfortably. Start by praying for God to lead you and guide you.
 - b. Close your eyes and breathe deeply and slowly.
 - c. With each inhale breath, pray “Spirit of the Christ.”
 - d. With each exhale breath, pray “I am grateful...”
 - e. Rest in the presence of the all-loving God. Stay open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance.
 - f. After a while, simply end by telling God “thank you” for his ability to revive.

For your work

1. How do you define joy, and how does it manifest in your life?
2. Together with your teammates, talk about the “personal wiring” thing. How does your natural tendency (pessimism vs. optimism) affect your joy?
3. As a group, what are some gratitude practices you can undertake together this Advent season? Are there practices you need to incorporate into your team’s rhythms—regardless of the season of the year?

For students (questions to have in your ‘back pocket’)

1. How’s your heart? Is it joyful?
2. How can you maintain a joyful spirit amidst the busyness of the Christmas season?
3. What is one thing you’ve learned about the love of God this semester?

How is this resource working for you? How is God using it to form you? Are there ways we can improve it? How can we pray for you? If you’ve got questions or thoughts, we invite you to be in touch with us. Send us an email at campus-ministries@bethel.edu



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