

IN EXCELSIS DEO

ADVENT 2024

Sunday, December 15

Read: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Christmas should be a time of joy, right? It should be about celebrating the birth of the Christ child. But the reality is that our world is filled with fear and anxiety, and many people are just not experiencing the “true joy” of the season. There are worries about the economy, inflation, wars and conflicts around the world, homelessness, and the threat of attacks upon our country by our enemies. And additionally, some people are facing personal issues of family problems, serious illness, loss of job, financial stress or other overwhelming issues. Add to that the stress of the holidays, such as shopping, gift wrapping, decorating, family visits, cooking, and getting ready for and attending parties. It’s a wonder any of us can feel any joy at all during this time!

So how do we celebrate the season in the midst of all of our problems?

A lot of people associate “joy” with “happiness.” We tend to believe that we are “joyful” when we are happy. When we are anxious and afraid, it is very hard for us to be joyful. But we shouldn’t measure our joy by our circumstances. Instead, as Christians we should be joyful *in spite* of our circumstances. God doesn’t promise us that our lives will always be a bed of roses. We will have our challenges, as well as our successes. But God did promise us that He will always be with us, no matter what happens. The key to true “joy” is in how we handle our negative circumstances.

During this time of Advent, there are two focal points for our joy. First, we should be joyful because of the *past*. We look back to when God sent His Son to be born on Christmas. God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to be with us, to teach us about His love, and to be sacrificed for our sins so that we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. One of our popular Christmas carols, *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*, illustrates Jesus’ sacrifice for us with the words “*God and Sinners reconciled.*”

Second, we should be joyful because of the *future*. Yes, we are very aware of the presence of evil in our world today, and the fact that there will always be evil, no matter what we do. But we can rejoice because of God’s promise that He will return to us. His Kingdom will come, He will triumph over evil, and we will live with Him in peace and joy forever!

Because of the *past* and the *future*, we can joyfully live in the

uncertainty of the present between the birth of Jesus and the coming of our Lord again.

We can celebrate Advent and praise God not **because** of our circumstances, but **in spite** of them! As Christians, we can be joyful because our situation here on Earth is temporary. When our Lord returns, we will no longer be a suffering people. We will be singing and dancing joyfully in the presence of God!

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