

Joy Incarnate

As we enter the third week of Advent and remember Jesus as the Author and Embodiment of joy, all of our holiday festivities can be praiseworthy efforts in celebrating Him, our **Joy Incarnate**.

Because we are made in the image of God, joy in Jesus is a believer's birthright.

"My joy will be in you and that joy will be complete." (John 15:11)

In regard to the incarnation, professor and author Thomas Howard said,

"The incarnation took all that properly belongs to our humanity and delivered it back to us, redeemed. All of our inclinations and appetites and capacities and yearnings are purified and gathered up and glorified by Christ.

He did not come to thin out human life; He came to set it free...

All the dancing and feasting and processing and singing and building and sculpting and baking and merrymaking that belong to us, and that were stolen away into the service of false gods, are returned to us in the gospel."

Doesn't this just make you want to stop right now and bake twelve dozen cookies, and ice them with the word **JOY**?

Much of life is understood in comparisons, a few being generosity and greed, day and night, young and old, love and indifference. If, however, we think the opposite of joy is sorrow or sadness, we may miss the opportunity to experience God's work of grace in our sorrows, trials and temptations. If joy is a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope in God's ability to work all things for the benefit of those who trust Him, perhaps a more accurate antonym for joy is unbelief.

Every day is a gift of invaluable worth, created and sustained by God's sovereign command.

We did nothing to fashion it, but we do have a choice in how we live it. We can waste it, or we can **enjoy it as a gift**, trusting in God's unwavering goodness and **rejoicing in His presence** no matter what our circumstances are.

Mary believed when the angel told her she would be the mother of the world's Savior, and she rejoiced.

Such a surprising message was shocking for a young, peasant girl, and circumstances leading up and following the Baby's birth would be very difficult. However, contentment was possible because she trusted God, and she responded with joy.

Rugged shepherds were the first to receive "**good news of great joy**," the heavenly birth announcement of the long-awaited and prophesied Messiah.

Though initially frightened, they believed the angel's message, found Jesus in a manger and worshiped Him.

Imagine a Christmas card of this design:

The front of the card depicts two lambs,
a small one huddled close to a larger one, who has a very visible scarlet stain.

Carefully you open the card; the text reads:

Rejoice that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

We know what it means because we have traveled with Jesus a long time.

His amazing reason for coming to earth was to be

"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

The Lamb, **"Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross."** (Hebrews 12:2)

In our Christmas card, we are the little lamb, the one for whom the Shepherd left his flock of 99,
to find, to save and to love forever.

And Joy erupts in heaven.

Scripture is so replete with messages of joy –
that deep longing and sacred call to allow Jesus, our **Joy Incarnate**, to meet all of our needs.

Joy is beautiful, a radiant warmth that is contagious.
May God help us spread His “**inexpressible and glorious joy**” in creative ways this Christmas and beyond.

If the Joy of the Lord is truly our abiding strength
and if His infinite grace and goodness make His joy a settled reality in our lives,
(even if circumstances are counter to what we believe constitute happiness)
we can concentrate on His immutable attributes, making our praise a sweet aroma ascending to heaven.

I will rise before the dawn of morn
and fix my gaze upon the eastern sky
and wait in silent wonder
for the burst of day upon my soul.

I will wait for the Eternal Mystery
to display His creative glory
in unequaled splendor of color, light and song.

I will wait to see the first songbird of morning,
its form silhouetted against an expectant sky.
I will wait to hear her tender voice in sweetness sing,
“Welcome! This day was made for you by God Himself.”
I will wait to glimpse cascading splashes of azure, crimson and violet
as they begin their ascent over the far horizon.

However, if instead
the sky is blanketed with clouds of impending gray,
and the threshold of morning
is greeted with the silent whisper of a storm-impending raindrop,
I will continue to wait in mystifying wonder
to behold before the eyes of my heart
the Bright and Morning Star,
and I will sing to Him my morning song of joyful praise.

Jesus, Master of my heart,
I praise You for the breath to speak Your name.
Jesus, my Advocate before the Father,
I praise You for the privilege of becoming God’s child.
Jesus, my Eternal King,
I praise You for coming to dwell among us and for giving us the gift of Yourself.
Jesus, Shepherd of my soul,
I praise You for Your constant care and protection through all my days and all my nights.
Jesus, my crucified, risen Savior,
I praise You for Your merciful forgiveness that cleanses away
the entrapping cobwebs of sin from my soul.
Jesus, my **Joy Incarnate**,
I praise You for inviting me to love You and enjoy You forever.
Jesus, my unending source of peace,
I praise You for the grace that has perfumed my life with confidence
to enter enemy territory of unbelief and to know
that Your fragrance of grace will linger after I have departed.

Jesus, my Lord,
I praise You for Your love that keeps me waiting, watching and hoping.
Jesus, the Living Lamb of God,
I praise You for the eternal song of joy You have placed upon my lips,
May Jesus Christ be praised!

“From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised.”

Psalm 113:3