

Order of Service 12th December 2021

On loud singing...

Holy Communion Third Sunday in Advent

Welcome

Hello and welcome to Hearsall at Home for 12th December 2021. Our service today includes Holy Communion, and our sermon explores the subject of joy.

Lighting of the Third Advent Candle (BPW 154)

We light this third Advent Candle to remind us of John the Baptist and of all God's messengers who prepare the way of the Saviour's coming.

The Apostle John writes: God sent his messenger, a man named John, who came to tell people about the light, so that all should hear his message and believe.

We open our worship with a carol...

Carol (BPW 157) **Away in a Manger**

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus - look down from the sky,
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
And fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

Opening prayers

Lord, like readying a room for a long-expected traveller, we prepare for your coming.
With the joy of a new mother receiving her baby,
with the delight of friends reunited,
with the wonder of daylight after darkness,
we anticipate your coming.

Come Lord to my world,
and make my heart ready to offer you a home.

I may smile at stars, fairy lights, carol services and Christmas gifts; but let all of these things be signs of the Word made flesh, living in our world again.

With awe and joy, I praise you, Lord of Infinity, for coming as an infant into our world.

Come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for you.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

Amen.

Christ is ready to come to each of our hearts and so we all have our own way of revealing him to the world. We sing, *If I were a butterfly...*

Song (WT 203) **If I were a Butterfly**

If I were a butterfly,
I'd thank you, Lord, for giving me wings.
If I were a robin in a tree,
I'd thank you, Lord, that I could sing.
If I were a fish in the sea,
I'd wiggle my tail and I'd giggle with glee
But I just thank you, Father, for making me, me.

Chorus

*For you gave me a heart and you gave me a smile,
You gave me Jesus and you made me your child,
And I just thank you Father for making me, me.*

If I were an elephant,
I'd thank you, Lord, by raising my trunk.
If I were a kangaroo,
You know I'd hop right up to you.
If I were an octopus,
I'd thank you, Lord, for my fine looks
But I just thank you, Father, for making me, me.

Chorus

If I were a wiggly worm,
I'd thank you, Lord, that I could squirm.
If I were a fuzzy-wuzzy bear,
I'd thank you, Lord, for my fuzzy-wuzzy hair.
If I were a crocodile, I'd thank you, Lord, for my great smile
But I just thank you, Father, for making me, me.

Chorus

*For you gave me a heart and you gave me a smile,
You gave me Jesus and you made me your child,
And I just thank you Father for making me, me.*

Offering

Heavenly Father, we praise you for the indescribable gift of Jesus, the Light of the World. Take our gifts and bless the world at Christmas time through them. Amen.

Our prayers of intercession are prepared by Derek Noel.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, as we come to this season of rejoicing and happiness, we pray for those for whom this time will be far from joyful.

We pray for those caught up in the terrors of war, conflict and oppression. So we pray for the people of Afghanistan, Myanmar, and parts of Eastern Europe.

We pray for children who are starved of food and affection and those whose lives are put at risk by loveless parents. We pray for those who will never know the joy of happy family life.

We pray for all who are brought low by disease and illness. We pray for all those working to combat the corona virus and those in the medical services whose work is made more difficult by its effects.

We pray for those who will be homeless this Christmas and we pray for those who will give help to the lonely and deprived.

We pray for your Church at this time of hope and joy. May this be a time, not only of celebration, but a time of consecration.

Finally, we pray for those who are known to us who are ill - Tina, Seb, Frances and Sandra.

Lord, hear our prayers, for we ask them in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ our Saviour. AMEN.

Thanks, Derek, for those prayers. We hear our Advent Bible readings now from Zephaniah and from Philipians.

Readings

Zephaniah 3: 14 – 20

¹⁴ Sing, Daughter Zion;
shout aloud, Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
Daughter Jerusalem!

¹⁵ The LORD has taken away your punishment,
he has turned back your enemy.

The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you;
never again will you fear any harm.

¹⁶ On that day
they will say to Jerusalem,

‘Do not fear, Zion;
do not let your hands hang limp.

¹⁷ The LORD your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.

He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.’

¹⁸ ‘I will remove from you
all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals,
which is a burden and reproach for you.

¹⁹ At that time I will deal
with all who oppressed you.

I will rescue the lame;

I will gather the exiles.

I will give them praise and honour
in every land where they have suffered shame.

²⁰ At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring you home.

I will give you honour and praise
among all the peoples of the earth
when I restore your fortunes

before your very eyes,'
says the LORD.

Philippians 4: 4 - 9

Final exhortations

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.

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

So joy is our theme today, and before we reflect on that, let's sing that lovely song,
You shall go out with joy...

Song (WT 495) **You Shall Go Out with Joy**

Verse

You shall go out with joy
And be led forth with peace;
The mountains and the hills
Will break forth before you;
There'll be shouts of joy
And all the trees of the field
Will clap, will clap, their hands!

Chorus

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands;

The trees of the field will clap their hands;

The trees of the field will clap their hands;

While you go out with joy!

Repeat Verse

Chorus x 3

Lord, may my words and our thoughts be pleasing in your sight. Amen.

Sermon

On loud singing

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say it: Rejoice!

I wonder how you respond to Paul's famous words, written, as they were, by a man in prison whose life was very likely drawing to its end. And they were sent to a colourful church that had its ups and downs and bust-ups. His little letter refers to **joy** or **rejoicing** about seventeen times. It's known as an epistle of joy.

The prophecy of Zephaniah was written at a time when the leaders of worship had allowed other religions to be practised in the Temple. Two kings Amon and Mannaseh, had fostered the veneration of foreign deities in Jerusalem and around Judea, and had promoted foreign morals. For much of his book, Zephaniah thunders judgement against Judah, her priests and her leaders, and also judgement on the nations at large. Yet the section we read concludes the book with God rejoicing over his people with loud singing. In a world of pain and disappointment, rejoicing remains.

As Christmas approaches we remember the angels' words to the shepherds, bringing tidings of **great joy** for all humanity. We think, also, of Jesus' much later words as he faced his execution:

*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete.*

We remember Nehemiah's telling phrase that

The joy of the Lord is your strength.

We think, too, of joyous Jewish festivals that punctuated the year with drama and celebration, worship and feasting. Joy gives an energy to our spirits; joy gives us strength to carry on. But how can we celebrate with joy during this time of Covid? Indeed we might ask, what **is** Christian joy?

Well, for the Christian, **joy is not a cheerful gloss over the daily drudge of life, denying painful realities.** Bert the chimney-sweeper in *Mary Poppins* is no model of Christian joy. It's not a matter of hiding life's grubbiness and hard work by covering it up with a happy song and dance routine. Paul says God spared him sorrow upon sorrow when the Philippians' emissary Epaphroditus recovered from a near fatal illness. Paul felt joy, but his joy did not blank out his sorrow.

And Christian joy is not an optimism that a particular project will succeed.

When the *Titanic* left Southampton on 15th April 1912, there was a great deal of optimism that this grand ship was quite invincible. As one writer put it:

The first few years of the 20th century, when the Titanic was built, were full of brash optimism based on remarkable advances in science and technology. It was a time of peace, progress and endless promise. Things were getting bigger, better and faster—the age more opulent and prosperous.... What could possibly stop the engines of progress or the captains of industry at their controls?

Paul's one-time ambition of travelling as far as Spain to preach the gospel had been thwarted. His life of missionary activity had been severely curtailed by regulations and barriers. Things are not always going to get better. Yet although many of Paul's projects failed, he was a man full of joy, who recommended joy to all.

What's more, **Christian joy is not a sunny disposition that something will turn up.** In Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Wilkins Micawber has this unrealistic idea that circumstances will always throw up something more positive. As a result of his attitude, his friend Traddles ends up having to delay his wedding to his sweetheart

after unwisely lending money to Micawber. At that time, something did **not** turn up, and Traddles suffered loss through his friend's sunny disposition, as his own assets were seized to pay Micawber's debts. Unfounded optimism is a dangerous thing. Paul knows that for him, something might not turn up. Yet his joy is unabated.

And joy is not tied to particular blessings or successes. In Hardy's novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Sergeant Troy wants to celebrate his wedding to Bathsheba Everdene with a wild party at the Harvest Supper. He insists on giving his wife's men hard liquor to celebrate his nuptials, as if this celebrating were the only thing that mattered. But as the men pass out from strong drink, Gabriel Oak, the hero of the book, notices a storm is brewing, and that the harvest is exposed, and does all he can to get it protected before the rain begins. And Paul is grateful for the gifts of the Philippians to support his ministry, but his joy is not tied to that particular event, nor to any particular happening.

And joy is not a knack of finding something positive in any particular circumstance. In the early twentieth century, the Pollyanna books emerged. The name Pollyanna is often used to signify an undaunted optimism. Her positive spirit grew from something her father taught her: the Glad Game. One Christmas, Pollyanna was hoping to receive a doll. Instead, she only got a pair of crutches! Her father made the Glad Game up on the spot. What could she find to be glad about? She was glad that she did not have to use crutches. So she went on. In every experience she looked for something to be glad about. Well, this creative attitude has much to recommend it, and it reminds me of the song *Count your Blessings!* But it's still not **quite** what Paul means by the idea of joy.

For Paul joy, then, is not a **cheerful gloss**, nor an **optimism over a particular project**; nor a **sunny disposition** that something will turn up; nor a **celebration of particular blessings**, nor a **knack of finding something positive** in every circumstance; though many of these may be healthy things.

As commentator Gerald Hawthorne puts it, ...

For Paul, joy is an understanding of existence that encompasses both elation and depression, that can accept with creative submission events which bring delight or

dismay because joy allows one to see beyond any particular event to the Sovereign Lord who stands above all events and ultimately has control over them.

And so we have Paul's admonition to rejoice **in the Lord**. A joyful spirit is an expression of trust, love and hope in the God who is over all and under all and beyond all and within all. Karl Barth said that joy was a *defiant nevertheless* to circumstances; a **full stop** against any other feelings or ideas that might rise up within him at what had happened in and around his life.

Joy is an expression of a trusting relationship with God. Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and if we want joy in our lives, we must learn obedience to God's call. *Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

Why does it have to be so? It's easy to understand, but hard to live by. To live a life of obedience to Christ is to accept **his** goals for our lives. Paul goes on to say, *Do not be anxious about anything...* Don't be **filled up with cares**... The old King James version had, 'Be careful for nothing', in other words, be carefree! How wonderful to think of a church full of carefree Christians!

Cares come from holding our own goals too tightly. Of course, we want to aim for things in life, but if we over-invest our sense of wellbeing in a particular outcome, we become hostages to fortune. To cherish our relationship with Christ as **paramount** releases us from cares, because we **always** remain in him.

Richard Foster said in *A Celebration of Discipline*,

Without obedience, joy is hollow and artificial..

Jesus said,

*Blessed are those who hear the word of God
and **obey** it.*

Joy means not being over-invested in particular outcomes. It means not taking ourselves too seriously. It frees us from self-importance and brings both an energy and an attractive, carefree, winsome spirit into our lives. Joy also sows more joy. The more rejoicing we do in God, the more joy and energy and hope we will have in our lives.

Can we experience joy this particular Christmas time, in spite of omicron and restrictions on our lives? If we've understood this talk, the answer is an unequivocal Yes.

Into **this** world of Covid and climate change, Christ comes. He always shares our humanity. He always renews our hopes. He always meets us just where we are. We find joy in the birth of every new child. We find joy in every season of life. We even find joy even when life approaches its end. We find joy when people disown us and doubt us. We find joy even when we are sick, disappointed or low...

During Advent we prepare to celebrate that precisely into **this** world - a world of climate change, covid, racism and war - into this particular world, he comes. He comes into your world, to share in your particular experiences, and to draw you close in the reality of your life. He enters our lives just as they are and roots us just where we belong - in an everlasting kingdom of love. He makes us princes and princesses; he gives us the right to be his daughters and sons; he gives us an everlasting destiny, and unassailable citizenship, an everlasting home and an undauntable spirit. He bids us live within earshot of the loud singing of heaven with which he always rejoices over his people.

Martin Prue and I wrote our next carol one year ago, reflecting on Christ's coming into the world we then saw. Today's world is not so very different, so we sing, *Revere the Secret Darkness...*

Carol Revere the Secret Darkness (Prue/Sutcliffe)

Revere the secret darkness of the womb
where life is nurtured in a sacred space
then birthed into the shadowed world to show
that glory lingers on a newborn face:
enraptured, how a mother's eyes display
that love is at the heart of heaven's way.

The gentle power of love is hard to prove
when souls are masked and bodies stand apart,
but God accepts the risk of drawing close
and heaven's life beats with a human heart.
As mother Mary feeds a baby boy
the world is tinged with everlasting joy.

For Jesus showed us what we may become
and demonstrated how we can be true
to love's demands in all of human life
by building peace in everything we do.
The frailty of a humble human frame
can overflow with life in Jesus' name.

And when we wander from the path of love
or suffer in the darkest vale of death
in tenderness and mercy he draws close
and intimates his grace with every breath.
The King of kings resided with the poor
to open heaven's goodness to us all.

At Christmas time, our hearts aglow with love,
into our world we welcome Christ again;
our world of internet and climate change
of viruses, dissent and racist hate.
We offer up our feet, our hands, our hearts
embodying the love that Jesus starts.

Holy Communion

Welcome to Holy Communion.

Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

John 6:35

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;
if you hear my voice and open the door,
I will come in to you and eat with you,
and you with me.

Revelation 3:20

God proves his love for us in
that while we still were sinners
Christ died for us.

Romans 5:3

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to this table,
not because you must but because you may,
not because you are strong, but because you are weak.. Come, not because any
goodness of your own gives you a right to come, but because you need mercy and
help. Come, because you love the Lord a little, and would like to love him more.
Come, because he loved you, and gave himself for you.
Come and meet the risen Christ, for we are his Body.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no
secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy
Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through
Christ our Lord. Amen.

The apostle Paul tells us of the institution of the Lord's Supper:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Loving God,

We praise and thank you

for your love shown to us in Jesus Christ.

We thank you for his life and ministry,

announcing the good news of your kingdom

and demonstrating its power

in the lifting of the downtrodden

and the healing of the sick,

and the loving of the loveless.

We thank you for his sacrificial death upon the cross

for the redemption of the world,

and for your raising him to life again,

as a foretaste of the glory we shall share.

We give you thanks for this bread and wine,

symbols of our world and signs of your transforming love. Send your Holy Spirit, we

pray, that we may be renewed into the likeness of Jesus Christ and formed into his

Body.

This we pray in his name and for his sake. Amen.

Jesus said, "This is my body which is for you; do this in memory of me".

Take this bread in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said:

"This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood.
Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me."

Drink this and remember
that Christ's blood was shed for you
and be thankful.

Your death, Lord, we commemorate.
Your resurrection we confess.
Your final coming we await.
Glory be to you, O Christ.

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life, we who drink his cup bring life to others, we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sussex Carol On Christmas Night All Christians Sing

On Christmas night all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring.
On Christmas night all Christians sing
To hear the news the angels bring.
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should men on earth be sad
Since our Redeemer made us glad.
Then why should men on earth be sad
Since our Redeemer made us glad.
When from our sin He set us free,
All for to gain our liberty.

When sin departs before Your grace
Then life and health come in its place.
When sin departs before Your grace
Then life and health come in its place.
Angels and men with joy may sing
All for to see the newborn King.

All out of darkness we have light
Which made the angels sing this night.
All out of darkness we have light
Which made the angels sing this night.
"Glory to God and peace to men
Now and forevermore! Amen!"

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
And the love of God;
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all, evermore.
Amen

Sung Blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you
Wherever he may send you;
May he guide you through the wilderness;
Protect you through the storm;
May he bring you home rejoicing
At the wonders he has shown you;
May he bring you home rejoicing
Once again into our doors.