

4th Advent

December 18/19, 2026

Joy and happiness are not the same thing. The world says, “Don’t worry, be happy.” The Lord gives us faith so that we see that all things are in His hands and this is the heart of joy. It can be the worst day of your life and you can still have joy. “Joy to the world, the Lord has come.”

Sometimes we think along the lines of life being doled out. One has to come to a special place to receive the Holy Spirit. One has to do this or that to receive a blessing from the Lord. Yes, time is doled out one moment at a time, so we live only in the moment in which we live, but reality is truth and the truth is that our good God holds the whole world in His hands. Faith opens our eyes to see things as they are. When we live by faith, we stop striving with the world, our circumstances, and the constant annoyance of this world’s plea to be discontent. We begin with fear of the Lord. This is not being afraid of the Lord, but realizing who He is, that He is the One with all authority and power. Humbling, yes, but our God is not like the man-made ideas that have proliferated over the ages. God is all powerful, yes, but God is love and love casts out fear. But we begin with eyes of faith seeing God for who He is.

We have been invited by faith into a journey. God, in who’s hands all things rest, has opened our eyes so that we can trust Him above all things. This world is created. We are created. He is the Creator. You are in His hands. He has given you promises. Those promises build a foundation of hope. Through all that this world brings against You, you have heard and are encouraged to believe that nothing in all of creation is able to separate you from the love of God. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, you too will pass from this life to eternal life. Yes, do hope for the good things that come your way. Is this not the basis of the celebration of Christmas? There are so many who love the Christmas season with its continuous celebration, but that points us to the real celebration, which is that above the momentary good things that come, we have hope in all that the Lord is doing here, now, and in us.

Knowing these things, be at peace. Our warfare, our contention, our rebellion against the eternal truth of the God of love has come to an end. Let the rebellion die in you. Yes, the warfare in this world continues. The insane – for that is what all who do not believe practice, that is trying the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result – will continue to seek for themselves. We have heard the Good News and we have been granted the peace which surpasses all understanding. Keep your hearts and minds on Christ Jesus and you will remain in the peace He gives. Listen to the Holy Spirit who is with you and in You and walk with the Spirit’s leading and direction. Know that this peace is not dependent upon circumstances, for the world still presses in, but that you have the hope of the Lord which let’s you know where you are heading and that it will all work together for good.

It came about in those days that Mary, the mother of our Lord, went into the hill country to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was with child, the same John who went to the Jordan to baptize. Of course the child in her leaped for joy. We are to leap with joy with the truth that our Lord is with us. No matter your circumstances, there is great joy in knowing that our Lord is with us. This is why He is called Emmanuel, which means “The Lord is with us.”

Protestants have been afraid of talking about Mary. “We are not them.” Our warfare has ended. Hear the word of the Lord, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” We have heard over and over again that we are to honor those with authority. Whether you like the current president or not, you are to honor that he sits in the office by God’s

authority. To honor the president is to honor what God is doing. Whether in small measure or large, we know how to do this. How much more so then should we honor the one chosen to bear our Savior? Mary is to be honored. Not worshiped, for God alone is to be worshiped, but honored. At least one Sunday each year, we have this Sunday to remember that we can give thanks for Mary's willing faith which led her to carry a burden above which most of us will never experience. I can only begin to imagine the hardship her circumstances brought upon her. With child and still a virgin in a day when being with child out of wedlock was an offense that carried the death sentence. Her faithfulness is something we all ought to model when she said, "Let it be done to me according to Thy will." Is this not at the heart of the call upon us all? Are we not called to lay down our rebellion and instead of seeking our will, letting the will of the Lord be done in us no matter the circumstances or the cost?

Listen to Mary's song, for she teaches us so that it may become our song, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Yes, this is the song of joy. Our souls are called to magnify our Savior, God with us! He does look with favor upon the lowliness of each of those whom He has come to save, but has come to lift us up to be with Him where He is. This is the journey of salvation. The road before Mary was hard and she would witness what no parent should witness, the death of her child. Such a thing is devastating. But it is as the Lord intends and His perfect will is accomplished, for through the reality of the death of her Son, we all have opened to us the way to everlasting and joy-filled life.

"The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

It is right and fitting that we should say with Elizabeth, "Blessed is the fruit of your womb," for Jesus carried upon Himself the grief of us all. He came to break free the way to life and life eternal. To live is Christ and to die is gain. Tomorrow, when you awaken, unless the Lord returns, the grief of this world will still be there. There will be wars and rumors of war. Calamities will happen. Parents will experience the horror of their child's death. This is as it must be for a time, but the One who has come, the One who will come again, has given us the path to walk. Walk in the faith You have been given. Trust in the God who holds you in His hands of love, and know that He is preparing for you and me something beyond our ability to comprehend. As you partake of the gift He has given you in communion, be filled with God's Spirit who is in you and come to the place of faith where you trust our Lord above all things.

"Restore us, O God; let Your face shine, that we may be saved." "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all!"

How can this not bring joy to your heart. Even in times of unhappiness, you can know the unsurpassable joy our Lord grants to His people of faith. Yes, this truly is a season to celebrate and be merry.

Faith, hope, peace, and joy are yours because the promise of the Lord is fulfilled in your hearing. Believe and let the Holy Spirit remove unbelief so that you may be filled with the truth of our Savior's purpose and promise. God is so good, not just all the time, but always. Faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love. Live in the love which is yours knowing that nothing in this created existence can ever separate you from God's love which has been given to you this day! Amen