

Advent Joy

Luke 2 is likely a familiar passage... a *go to* during this season that recounts the events around the birth of Jesus, our Christ of Christmas. We'll walk through Luke 2 on Christmas Eve, right here at 5:00, like we do every year.

We heard the great promise again:

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹

Good news that will cause great **joy**... this is the **joy** of Advent, the joy we celebrate on this third Advent Sunday, the joy we acknowledge with the light of this third candle.

So, we'll drill down on this theme of joy, just like we did on the first week with hope, and last week with peace.

Kyle brought us a word on **peace** last Sunday; if you didn't hear it, check it out online. It was really good; I'm glad we have a youth pastor who *gets it*... who effectively proclaims the Good News of the Gospel.

Kyle masterfully pointed out that **peace** is much more than **rest**. Peace certainly includes rest... but it also includes work, perhaps even more work than rest. Peace is **completeness** under God... and if we are going to be complete, we must be about the work for which we were created and to which we are called.

So... just as *peace is more than rest*, I will say, today, that **joy is more than happiness**.

Joy certainly includes happiness... but can we agree that joy is deeper, stronger, even more complex than mere happiness?



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:8-12

Northshore Church



¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 2:10–11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

If we can agree with that... might you allow me to push it just a bit farther, and say that joy is more than happiness, and even includes sorrow? Are there places for sorrow and sadness within our Godly understanding of joy?

Those from more historic, mainline traditions of Christianity would say that is certainly the case for Advent. Perhaps you are from such a tradition and have determined that we are doing Advent *all wrong* since we have way too much happiness... too much color and light and noise and celebrating.



Historically, Advent is a time of longing and preparation... sort of *Lent in December*. It is a time to prepare for the coming of the Lord.

In Advent we remember

- The Lord's First Advent as the Babe in Bethlehem, Emmanuel who walked among us... taught, healed, and bore our sins.
- The Lord's Second Advent, when He will return and shall reign for ever and ever.
- The Lord's Daily Advent... as He walks with us, as He lives in us and through us.

Traditional observances of Advent are more "O come, O come Emmanuel" than "Joy to the World." More serious. Darker. Softer tunes with minor keys (not so much horns, drums, and cymbals).

But, alas... that just doesn't suit us so well these days. It doesn't align with the calendar of our culture, nor the mood of our day. So, *we do what we do* during Advent.

I have a couple of friends that have made this one of their crusades on social media. They seem angry that Christians are so loud and happy during Advent. I tell them that I celebrate Advent just as it is specified in the Bible (turns out that a lot of what we do in church is not specified in the Bible... Advent, Lent, Royal Rangers, Isagenix, Essential Oils).

Of course those who have a more traditional approach to Advent also have **12 Days of Christmas**... so maybe they have it right after all. Christmastide starts at sunset on the 24th (about the time of our service here on Christmas Eve) and goes for 12 days of feasting. Traditionally, that is when the lights and carols and feasting and gift giving all happens.

But, like I said, we do what we do; perhaps fueled by the commerce of it all (and our culture's impatience), we **celebrate** during Advent.

Nevertheless, I'll ask it again: Are there places for sorrow and sadness within our Godly understanding of joy?

To help us think about this I'm going to take us to an *unusual passage* for an *unusual reason*.

The unusual **passage**, at least for a sermon supposedly about Advent Joy, is the Old Testament Book of Hosea.

The unusual **reason** is that it comes from my *personal devotions*. It is not that it is unusual that I have a discipline of personal Bible study and prayer... but rather it is unusual that I mix my personal devotions with my preaching.

I heard a wise pastor say recently that it is too easy to confuse **working** for God for being **close** to God. I'll admit it; I've been there. I've been some sort of *professional Christian* for over 30 years... and it is way too easy for me to confuse my working for God for being personally close to God. I have to work at it. One of the ways I work at keeping those things from being confused is I keep my *personal* study and prayer separate from my *professional* study and prayer. I don't generally preach from my private devotions, nor do I consider my preparation for public preaching as my devotions.

That is one of the reasons I generally preach from a series, usually a textual series that takes us through a Book of the Bible. Without the discipline of that tactic, I might just talk about whatever is on my mind... like today.

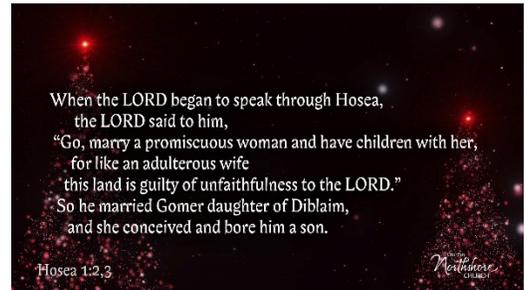
For Bible reading I have a routine of reading through the Bible each year, using one of the plans at www.BibleGateway.com. This year I've used their plan that gives me a passage from the Old Testament and a passage from the New Testament each day. Since the tool dispenses the passages in the order in which they are found in the Bible, these days I am nearing the end of each Testament, putting me in the Minor Prophets and the Book of Revelation. I think I might have let out an audible **ugh** when I started down the homestretch several days ago.

The Minor Prophets and the Book of Revelation are important, valued parts of the Bible... but they aren't exactly *easy reading*... not very Christmassy.

So I was in Hosea... an awful scene. Hosea wrote and prophesied when the divided kingdoms of Israel were going off the rails, around the time the southern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians, and before Judah fell to the Babylonians. In both cases it was their sin that destroyed them, especially the sin of corrupt, evil leaders.

To warn His people, God told His prophet (Hosea) to do something unusual:

² When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.” ³ So he married Gomer²



The New International Version that I have on the screen is *polite*, saying “a **promiscuous** woman.” Other translations say *harlot* or *adulterous...* a few *call it like it is: prostitute*.

In order to illustrate the unfaithfulness of God’s people, He told His prophet to marry **a prostitute!** Well... how is that for a Christmas message? We may say “ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas” but we have something entirely different in mind.

And as we can read in Hosea, this wasn’t some sort of *Pretty Woman* tale where Prince Charming sweeps this unfortunate soul off her feet and turns her life around. No... she doesn’t change. She keeps at it. And yet God tells Hosea to go again and get His adulterous wife, keep her, and love her... continuing to demonstrate the unfaithfulness of God’s people in spite of God’s enduring love.

The 14 chapters of Hosea are dominated by the repeated failure of God’s people, and the punishment they brought upon themselves. Gomer, the harlot, is held up as the symbol of God’s horribly unfaithful people.

Not a message of joy. God says as much through His prophet in chapter 9:

Do not rejoice [have joy], Israel;
do not be jubilant [celebrate] like the other nations.
For you have been unfaithful to your God;
you love the wages of a prostitute... ³



² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Ho 1:2–3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Ho 9:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

This is not a message of joy; it is a message of shame and sorrow. Through Hosea and Gomer, God demonstrated how His people so easily choose the despicable and destructive over the love of the Father.

They may have been celebrating, jubilant like the culture, satisfying whims and cravings... but their unfaithfulness would result in their destruction. It is a dark and gloomy picture.

But... there is chapter 6, where we find a glimpse of what **can be**. It was not a report of what *did* happen in Hosea's time (around 800 BC)... but a prophecy of coming times, saying:

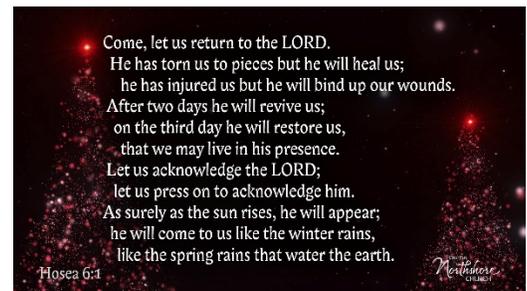
"Come, let us return to the LORD.

He has torn us to pieces
but he will heal us;
he has injured us
but he will bind up our wounds.

² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will restore us,
that we may live in his presence.

³ Let us acknowledge the LORD;
let us press on to acknowledge him.

As surely as the sun rises,
he will appear;
he will come to us like the winter rains,
like the spring rains that water the earth."⁴



"He will come to us" is a promise fulfilled by Jesus. O come Emmanuel, God with us... saturate us like the rains. God did appear; God did come to us, and does come to us, in Jesus.

We can "return to the Lord" because He comes for us, just like Hosea persisted after his wayward wife.

God's people were "torn to pieces" and "injured." But this was not the act of an arbitrary God taking out His groundless anger. They were torn and injured by self-inflicted wounds; sin always results in pain.

Notice verse 2, and the promise that restoration would come after **three days**.

² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will restore us,
that we may live in his presence.

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Ho 6:1-3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Restoration did not come in three days from Hosea's prophesy; God's people suffered in exile and occupation for hundreds of years. Then, *what of* these three days? Perhaps there are three significant days that come to mind... not three days associated with Christmas, but three days associated with Easter, three days suffered in the grave by Jesus.

Consider Isaiah's prophesy:

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering...,
He was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

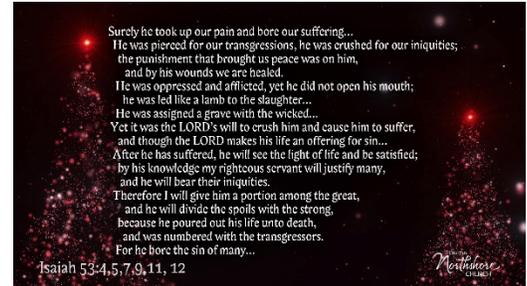
⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter...

⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked...

¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin...

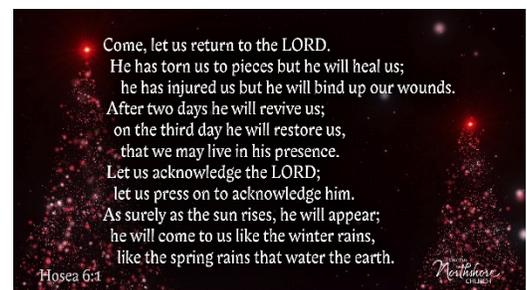
¹¹ After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, ⁿ
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many... ⁵



It is not enough that **we** bear the pain that results from sin. Our **suffering** is not enough, nor is any bit of our **righteousness** enough. It takes more to make a way for us to God... a way that only He can make. Only an infinite God can cross an infinite gap. Jesus is The Way.

So, yes, we can return to the Lord, as promised by Hosea... but it is because **He** came and comes for us first.

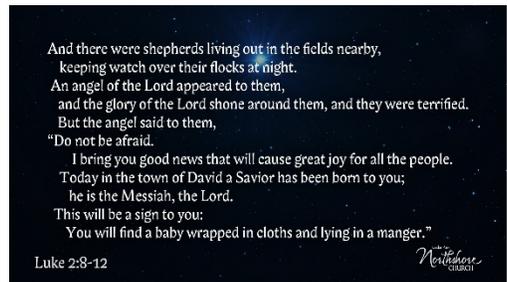


⁵ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Is 53:4–12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

This is the Good News that causes great joy for all people.

Jesus came. Jesus comes for us.

Joy is the response to Good News... the news that Christ has come.



I'll ask the question again... is our understanding of joy expansive enough that it can include both happiness and sorrow.

I think the traditionalists are right... there is room for sorrow. Acknowledging our sin, our shortcomings, our unfaithfulness, the distance we put between us and God, reveals the greatness of God. Owing our lowliness reveals just how far the Lord lifts us with His salvation, His coming to us.



Joy is **satisfaction**... not merely our satisfaction, but the Father's satisfaction. The Father is satisfied when we stand with the righteousness provided by Jesus. And we are satisfied, having acknowledged our hunger and believing that only Jesus can save... that Jesus paid the price, bore our sins, and gives us life. Our hunger is met by Jesus, we are filled with Jesus.

Joy includes it all, sorrow for sin and satisfaction in Jesus.

Receiving Advent Joy is a time to know that God *transforms* sorrow to joy.

In Jeremiah, God proclaimed:

I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. ⁶



⁶ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Je 31:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Psalmist proclaimed that there may be pain in the night, but joy comes in the morning. God turns:

wailing into dancing⁷

God transforms grief into joy.

Jesus, Himself, promised:

Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.⁸

Grief turns into joy. Sorrow and grief, acknowledging how far we are from God without His rescue, is the *seed* that turns into joy.

By faith, let's receive that Advent Joy today.

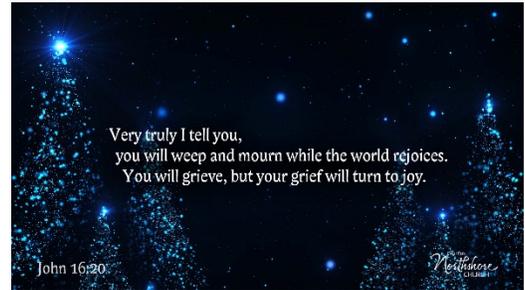
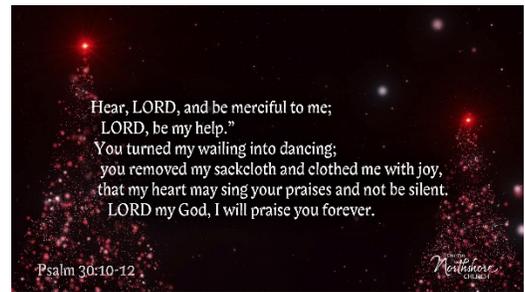
Let's acknowledge how far we are from God without His rescue.

Let's thank God for the Good News, the Gospel that calls us to believe, to receive forgiveness from sin, to be pulled into the eternal family of God.

Let's bring our sorrow, our grief and pain... and allow God to turn it into joy.

We bring our self-inflicted wounds as well as those caused by circumstances... the evil we have done, and the evil done to us.

Let's do so in dedication and prayer. On our knees and with our hands raised in signing. These are moments to let faith arise, to let joy fill our hearts.



⁷ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Ps 30:10–12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Jn 16:20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.