

## **“Imagine Joy”**

**December 11, 2022**

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### **Isaiah 12:2-6 (NRSV)**

<sup>2</sup> Surely God is my salvation;

I will trust and will not be afraid,  
for the LORD is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.”

<sup>3</sup> With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. <sup>4</sup> And you will say on that day:  
“Give thanks to the LORD; call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations;  
proclaim that his name is exalted.

<sup>5</sup> Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be known in all the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

***This week’s sermon is more of a brief devotion or reflection on the text because of the creative focus of worship on the Third Sunday of Advent.***

*With joy you shall draw water from the wells of salvation.*

Isaiah didn’t write these words at an easy time. The southern kingdom of Judah essentially stood alone – a small nation surrounded by empires hungry for power and expansion. The northern kingdom had fallen, their attempts at treaties and alliances failed. But even in the face of impending doom, Isaiah offered a word of hope. “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.”

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent, the day of joy, Gaudete Sunday, when purple gives way to rose, when anticipation turns to celebration, when we remember that God wants us to experience joy while we wait for the fulfillment of God’s promises. Even if we don’t entirely know what we’re waiting for, or what it will be like when it comes, or whether we’ll recover the familiar or if everything will be so different we can’t recognize it. Joy is God’s gift to us “in the midst.”

The angel that appeared to the shepherds that night outside Bethlehem announced “good news of great joy” for all people. “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord.” We know what *that* joy is all about. Christmas is the most joyful day of the year. The birth of Christ. Presents under the tree. Decorations and parties and families and friends. Chestnuts roasting on an open fire. Kids from one to 92 making merry. We look forward to the celebration every year and the joy it will bring.

But what if all this isn’t about building up to the perfect, most joyful holiday we can make it? What would it be like to experience joy here and now – not just to hope for it or expect it to come at some moment in the future, but to live in joy today? Even with the uncertainty of what’s to come. Even when we don’t know how everything is going to turn out. Even when we’re not sure what the future holds for us.

Isaiah saw a time coming when wars and threats of war would come to an end, when God’s people would be delivered and would return to their homes in peace. He believed it and claimed it and shared that vision with everyone around him, from the king to the countryside. Though his vision was of the future, his joy was in the present. “Shout aloud and sing for joy, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

The joy Isaiah proclaimed wasn’t just a feeling. It was the kind of joy that made people shout or sing, the kind of joy you can’t keep to yourself, the kind you just have to share. Have you ever felt that kind of joy? What would it be like to feel it again, today, now? The Good News of the Gospel is not just that Christ is coming, but that he’s already here. He’s in the kindness we share, the gifts we give, the prayers we offer, the assurance we know in our hearts. Do you feel it? Can you imagine joy?