



The Kingdom of Heaven Has Come Near

Second Sunday of Advent – Joy

Matthew 3:1–12

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

December 4, 2016

Thoughts for the Week

Scripture: Luke 1:46-56

Who is This Glad Girl and Why is She Singing?

*“All the Whos down in Who-ville liked Christmas a lot
But the Grinch, who lived just north of Who-ville did not...”*

So begins the classic tale *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* by Theodore Geisel, a. k. a. Dr. Seuss. Do you know the story? High above a small town where people joyfully celebrate Christmas lives a creature known as the Grinch. He can't understand what all this noise and singing and feasting and giving of presents is all about.

Even after he sneaks into Who-ville dressed as St. Nick and steals all the presents from the Whos, he is dumbfounded to find that they still singing and celebrating. While the Grinch experiences a sort of conversion Dr. Seuss still leaves the question largely unanswered: why is everybody so happy at Christmas?

Has this question ever crossed your mind? You ever find yourself surrounded by people full of holiday cheer, but you don't feel much like singing? Everybody around you is smiling and laughing, but you feel like weeping. They're all so carefree while your mind is full of worry, stress and pain? Maybe you're on the Grinch's side: why is everybody else so happy?

When I feel that way, I like to reread the story of a young girl in the Bible who had a lot of reasons to be a Grinch at Christmas. She is a member of the poorest class of her people having no political power or rights. She is young and female in a culture that treats women as little more than property.

She's an unwed mother, which is often an automatic death sentence in her community. Her fiancée is seriously considering calling the marriage off, which could mean she would never find a husband who would have her.

Christmas is coming - in fact the very first Christmas - and in spite of all she can be worried and sad about, the Bible tells us in Luke 1:46-56 that she is so happy she is singing a song. Who is this glad girl and why is she singing?

As we worship today, wherever we are, my prayer is that the song of this young girl named Mary will put a song in your heart too.

Happy Birthday – Lenore (12/5)

Second Sunday of Advent-Joy

One of my favorite Bible passages often pops up at the beginning of every Advent:

*“The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5)*

I like this verse because it reminds me of several things:

- 1 I can be guided by the smallest twinkle of light
as long as I stay focused on it.*
- 2. Sometimes I think I need more light than I have been given, when in reality
I only yearn for it because it would make me feel more comfortable.*
- 3. I can't focus on the light when I'm thrashing about in panic. When I'm feeling overwhelmed I need to stop
and breathe in light, breathe out fear; breathe in love, breathe out despair,
so that I can see the light that is there to see.*
- 4. The light of the world is always with us, and I have to cultivate the habit of noticing good things during
dark times: the kind person, the thoughtful gesture,
the bits of light Christ has put in my path.
The more attention I dedicate to this,
the less of my heart the darkness is able to grasp.*
- 5. God did not eradicate Christ's dark pain and suffering
on Good Friday, but transformed it into unimaginable good.
He can transform the darkness in my life, too,
if I carry my cross out of love for Him.*

*Please join us today in praying for all who are struggling in darkness,
that they may see the light of Christ and find rest in it.*

Amen