



# JOY

week 3

**SCRIPTURE:** In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!” — *Luke 2:8-14*

**QUOTE:** “The joy that Jesus came to bring is from outside this world. It is the very joy that Jesus himself has in God the Father — which he has had from all eternity and will have forever.”

— *John Piper, The Dawning of Indestructible Joy*<sup>5</sup>

**DAY 13**

## Things Treasured

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.*

**LUKE 2:15-20**

Did you know the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic? Or that today there are more than 6,000 languages in the world? That means the Bible needs to be translated into all those languages so people all over the world can hear about Jesus.

Thankfully, the Lord is using a lot of people to complete this big job. However, translating the Bible is hard work. This is especially true with today's devotional reading. A more practical way of writing this passage could be: "Mary took all the things that were being said about her newborn son and stored them away in a safe place, her memories. She then, as time would permit, would try to put them all together and attempt to make sense of them."

In other words, Mary was building her faith. Faith is built on the accumulation of what is learned, heard and experienced. These are held in our memories and then sorted out for truth. Ultimately, they result in our beliefs.

In Luke 1:31-33, Gabriel announced to Mary, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."

In Luke 1:42, Elizabeth proclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed!"

The shepherds excitedly shared in Luke 2:11-12, "Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger."

All these sayings would become the underpinnings of Mary's faith. That faith would ultimately be tested at the cross but fully rewarded when hearing, "He is risen!"

Christmas is the joyous beginning for all believers' faith. The Lord's continued interaction in the believer's life will shape that faith. But ultimately faith is founded on the things treasured and pondered in the heart.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

**YOUNGER CHILD:** Sing "Go Tell It on the Mountain" together as a family.

**OLDER CHILD:** Close your eyes and pretend you were one of the shepherds celebrating the birth of Jesus. What would you hear? Smell? Feel?

**TEENAGER:** What do you treasure and ponder in your heart about your relationship with the Lord? How has this helped build your faith in Him?

## PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who brings joy into our lives not only during Christmastime but every day.

**DAY 14**

Great Joy

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.***LUKE 2:8-12**

Imagine the scene: A group of ordinary men, working the night shift on a hillside outside of the city. The task of caring for their flock of sheep was the same this night as it had been for generations before. These shepherds were ordinary men doing a common task. Yet, this night would be anything but typical.

Luke explains that when the angel appeared and the glory of the Lord showed around them, these ordinary men were terrified. Their fear was so great that the angel's first words were, "Fear not." Shock, surprise, awe and amazement were likely just a few of the emotions this band of overseers experienced in those moments.

The angel's announcement didn't end there. The message given to these men that night was the greatest message ever relayed: "Good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." The Prince of Peace came down that night in the form of a babe for all people. He came for those ordinary shepherds, the kings on their thrones, the young and old, friend and foe.

After the message was delivered and the heavenly host sang their praises, the shepherds responded in what was the only appropriate response: They went to find this baby.

They believed, worshipped and then proclaimed what they had seen and heard. Scripture does not record what happened to the shepherds after that wondrous night. It is probable that the next night found them back in that same field, watching over those same sheep. Yet nothing would ever truly be the same.

As Luke 2:20 records, "The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them."

The joy of that announcement would be forever etched in their memories. Those men were likely transformed by the overwhelming peace they must have experienced as they peered into that manger.

Two thousand years later, the story holds that same transforming power. Those who hear the message and believe can walk in joy and peace. Like the shepherds, we can choose to believe, worship and proclaim this good news as we celebrate this Christmas season.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

**YOUNGER CHILD:** Sing “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” together as a family.

**OLDER CHILD:** How do you think you would feel or respond to seeing an angel? Would you laugh? Cry? Sing back?

**TEENAGER:** How does having faith in Christ give us joy and peace? What does this look like in your everyday life?

## PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who offers everyone real joy and true peace when they put their faith and trust in Him.

**DAY 15**

## Heartfelt Joy

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.*

**LUKE 2:25-38**

Today's technology is unbelievable. From self-driving cars to talking robots, our world is changing faster than ever before. What was only an idea a few years ago is now commonplace in our homes and workplaces. Technology has dramatically changed our lives.

Take having a baby, for instance. Moms and dads can go to a doctor's office and see images of their unborn baby. They can hear the heartbeat and find out if it's a boy or girl. Several decades ago that would not have been possible, and certainly not 2,000 years ago.

However, for Mary and Joseph, no ultrasound was needed! They had something that no amount of technology could reproduce. This young couple had angelic visitors from the Lord.

The angel Gabriel personally came to Mary with the news that she would give birth to the Messiah. In a dream, Joseph was told by an angel to give the baby the name "Jesus." Wow! To be told that you will not only become parents but are going to be the earthly mom and dad of the long-awaited Savior ... talk about heartfelt joy!

The Bible describes many beautiful moments surrounding Jesus' birth. One of the sweetest encounters with the newborn King was when Simeon and Anna met Him. As Mary and Joseph were fulfilling the requirements prescribed by the Torah for their new baby, two unsuspecting people were given the opportunity to express their heartfelt joy. Consider the reactions of Simeon and Anna recorded in Scripture:

"Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said, 'Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace...'" (Luke 2:28-29)

"At that very moment, she (Anna) came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38)

Simeon praised God as he held Jesus in his arms. Anna thanked God and immediately began to tell others about the Lord's plan for salvation. Are there any better responses to Jesus?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

**YOUNGER CHILD:** What makes you happy? What is one thing you can do to help others be happy during Christmastime?

**OLDER CHILD:** How can you help your joy for Jesus overflow into others' lives this holiday season? As a family, brainstorm ways you can serve your community and share the joy of Jesus through service.

**TEENAGER:** Read John 15:1-11 with your family. As we abide in Jesus, what does He produce in and through us that fills us with His joy?

## PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who gives us many reasons to express heartfelt joy.

**DAY 16****Overcoming Darkness**

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.*

**ISAIAH 9:2-3**

One of the most beloved traditions surrounding the celebration of Christmas is singing Christmas carols. For centuries, poets and composers have gathered inspiration from the story of Christ's birth and the joy, hope and peace that it provides. The lyrics of these hymns inspire and remind worshippers of the beauty of this birth.

Phrases such as "a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices" from the song "O Holy Night" proclaim that this is an epic tale. Yet, this isn't just a beautiful story; it is the pivot point for humanity. People were walking in darkness, but God sent a great light. He made a way. Jesus left the glory of heaven to be born in a manger. The weary world rejoiced.

Weary. That is a word that many can relate to during the Christmas season. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "weary" as "exhausted in strength, endurance, vigor or freshness." This isn't just referring to ordinary fatigue; this is sheer exhaustion.

This world can certainly bring weariness. We grow weary of bills, busy schedules and complicated relationships. Sheer exhaustion feeds off of circumstances that seek to overwhelm us. In the midst of it all, we can easily forget that these things are temporary. The difficulties faced today will all pass away; and one day, every one of us will stand before our Creator and none of it will matter. None of it.

The only thing that will matter in that moment is whether or not we chose to live our life surrendered to Him. Managing the troubles of this life may be the current reality, but they will cease to exist. Meanwhile, rest can be found in Christ. Taking our burdens to Him and being refreshed by the truth found in His Word can restore the joy this world can so easily steal away.

Strivings can be set aside when eyes are fixed on the eternal truth that there is reason to rejoice. In the end, light wins. Jesus overcame the darkness!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

**YOUNGER CHILD:** As a family, sing “O Holy Night.”

**OLDER CHILD:** Together, sing or listen to “O Holy Night.” Then, talk through each verse of the song and the meaning behind them.

**TEENAGER:** What are some things that seem to take energy out of you? What are some things that give you energy? How can we find rest and refreshment in Christ?

## PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who overcomes darkness and brings light into our lives, families and homes.

**DAY 17**

## Marvelous Purpose

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.*

**JOHN 13:34-35**

As we reflect on the birth of Jesus, let's consider God's marvelous purpose for sending Jesus to Earth. Jesus lived a sinless life, took the punishment for every sin as He died on the cross, then rose from the grave, conquering sin and death. Therefore, all who believe are no longer separated from God by sin, but are forgiven, freed from sin, adopted as children of God and filled with Christ's joy.

Just as the Old Testament foretold, Jesus' marvelous purpose for coming was to rescue His people. His sacrificial love and willingness to take the punishment for sin is nothing short of amazing. As a result, we who believe are consumed with a deep desire to live in worship and joyful adoration of Jesus, our Savior.

So, as joy-filled followers of Christ, how do we live in worship and adoration? What transformation shows that Jesus is Lord of our life? Jesus answered that question when he was asked in Luke 22 which commandment in the law was the greatest. He responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (v. 37) and to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 39).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit inside of us, living in worship means learning how to love. That same sacrificial love that brought Jesus to Earth and compelled Him to the cross now fills our hearts and overflows onto everyone around us.

People will notice how different this love is: patient, kind, humble, forgiving and enduring. This love always looks for the best in others; it cares for others more than self and is full of joy. When we love one another in this way, it is actually Jesus loving through us. We're continuing to live out Jesus' purpose for coming to Earth, and are telling the world that Jesus is still here to rescue His people.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

**YOUNGER CHILD:** Sing "Jesus Loves Me" together.

**OLDER CHILD:** Read Matthew 22:37-39. Come up with hand motions to help memorize this verse together.

**TEENAGER:** Share how Jesus has transformed you. Be sure to include what you were like before Christ, how you came to know Him, and what life is like now that you know Christ as your Lord and Savior.

## PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who transforms lives.

**DAY 18**

Overflowing with Joy

*Read together at home, around the table or at bedtime.***LUKE 1:26-33**

Have you ever been afraid? Fear is a powerful emotion. Sometimes we are afraid of scary movies, bad storms, dangerous animals or unexpected sounds we hear at night. From our reading today, when we put ourselves in Mary's position, it is not hard to understand why she was afraid.

In Mary's situation, fear was a natural response when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. At her young age, nothing had prepared her for this moment. It is OK to be afraid of some things. The Lord has given us this emotion to help and protect us. Fear is a natural reaction designed to keep us safe when we find ourselves in a potentially dangerous situation.

Fortunately, Gabriel's visit was not a dangerous situation. He was sensitive to her emotions and eased her fears. Within moments, Mary's fright melted away. She was able to focus on the wonderful news he had come to deliver — she would give birth to the Son of God.

Gabriel declared, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus" (Luke 1:31). Gabriel's message brought Mary comfort. Her fear was gone and her heart overflowed with joy. As she had time to reflect and recall all that happened to her, Mary confidently said, "My soul praises the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..." (Luke 1:46b-47).

Thankfully, Mary was able to receive the wonderful message Gabriel came to deliver. She fought through her fear and did not let it distract her from hearing the good news Gabriel came to bring.

With Christmas only a few days away, are you able to hear the wonderful, good news about the baby Mary would name Jesus? What distractions are keeping you and your family from experiencing true joy this Christmas?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

**YOUNGER CHILD:** When you are afraid, what makes you feel brave?

**OLDER CHILD:** How do you fight fear? Commit to memorizing Psalm 56:3.

**TEENAGER:** How does knowing you are in Christ help you overcome your fear?

## PRAYER PROMPT:

Thank the Lord for sending Jesus, who offers overwhelming joy to all His children.

**Live it out:** Joy grows when we share it! Brainstorm together how your family can spread the joy of Jesus this Christmas. You can bake cookies for neighbors, sing carols at a nursing home, or write encouraging notes to church volunteers. Whatever you do, let your joy in Christ overflow to those around you.

