

December 11, 2016 Advent 111

Luke 1: 39-48, 57-67 **‘The Joy of Christmas for Young and Old’**

Let’s activate our sanctified imagination. Cast your mind with me to a time when you were rushing to take your little one to some appointment or lesson or class. Things are going according to schedule until you approach a level railway crossing just as the lights begin to flash, the bells begin to sound and the safety gate drops down in front of you. Is everyone with me?

Our first thought needn’t be unmentioned. Our second is **“Oh no! We’re going to be held up by this stupid train and be late.”** Right?! And we know how we hate to be late. Just then, our child calls out from the backseat, **“Wee, we’re so lucky! We get to watch the train go by!”** In that moment the *veil of the ordinary* is pulled back and we join our child in the **Joy** of the moment. Are we feeling it?

Today we celebrate **Joy** the theme of **Advent III**. Today we look at Luke’s version of the Nativity. The story actually begins with an *angel* appearing to Zechariah in the Holy of Holies. Elizabeth his wife will finally conceive and bear a son in her old age: Shear **Joy!** The Good News of the *angel* Gabriel comes to one too old, but it is still **\brings Joy**.

Later, as we know an *angel* appears to young Mary in the hill country of Galilee. The Good News comes to one too young. And yet **God**’s message of new birth remains good news, issuing in **Joy**.

Elizabeth, now in her sixth month filled with the **Holy Spirit** upon meeting Mary **Joyfully declares**

**“Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”**

Mary filled with the **Spirit joyfully sings** the **‘Magnificat.’**

Next a new father Zechariah filled with the **Spirit** and caught up in the **joy** of naming his son John. What a wonderful name, John—fills me with Joy too. Well anyway caught up in the Spirit and filled with Joy Zechariah *prophesies* the ‘**Benedictus.**’

Joy embraces **God’s dream** for **Christmas** and **joy** moves the story along in Luke’s gospel.

The challenge according to Luke is **to see through the veil of the ordinary** and **to hear the message of new beginnings, by finding joy within it.** *Joy* brings us into sync, into a deeper participation in **God’s** dream for Christmas.

The **veil of the ordinary** was first lifted for me concerning this part of the Christmas story over thirty four years ago. I found myself getting in sync when we were expecting our first born. My wife attended a UCW Advent Pot-luck and worship evening. We were just about four months along as today’s lessons were read that evening. When the women were asked to reflect on new life in their midst, my wife suddenly and for the first time felt the fluttering of new life in her womb. She was so excited: **Over joyed** actually. And after telling me everything when she arrived home I too became excited and **over joyed.**

Then, I declared in total certainty that the child was a boy and we would name him...(John.) No Zachary, after Zechariah in the story. For the next five months that became my mantra: ***“It’s a boy and he will be named Zachary.”***

Now I won’t claim outright, that I was filled with the **Holy Spirit** that night, but, I was filled with **Joy** and a boy was first born to us and we did name him Zachary. And I was changed forever.

Most of us here know the feeling, the experience of expecting a baby or having a newborn around Christmas. The promise of new life stirring, or a newborn cooing in our arms, or a toddler’s first Christmas, fills our hearts with new **joy** and amazement. I assume we are including grandchildren and great

grandchildren here. I'm getting texts and emails most days of my grandchildren discovering the joy and amazement of Advent and Christmas preparations. The unfiltered emotions on their face remind us to let go and stay in the moment. Their parents seem pretty joyful too.

So, cast yourself back through the generations and see it. Feel it. Savour it.

Cast back to when you saw through the **veil of the ordinary** and recognized the **Joy**, those *angelic* messages and moments of new life.

Now, rest in the glow, the heart warmth, the **Joy** revisited.

Notice how your family's newborn and Mary's newborn merge and bring a new and *intensified* blessing to young and old alike.

Friends, the fullness of **God's** dream for Christmas is *seeing* through the **veil of the ordinary** to recognizing the *angelic* message of Joy.

It is *hearing* the good news:

Every **infant** is the precious **Christ Child** to us.

Every New Born is a **Joy**.

Every child is to grow up to become **Christ** to the neighbour.

Our part is the *radical hospitality*, the *intensified humanity* that helps this happen in one another. The urge, the energy to do this comes from **joy**. **Advent III** celebrates the **gift of joy**.

The Application for Advent III

The secret, the mystery is simply this,

**Joy is the way we welcome the new life of the Spirit,
and make ourselves a joy to one another.**