

# 2023 Advent Devotional

## Part 2 of 2

The  
LORD  
your

**God**

is with you, he is mighty to save.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17, NIV

By Pastor Barry Nelson

This is Part 2 of our Advent Devotional which includes:

Joy: December 17-23

Love: December 24-30, which includes a Christmas Day devotional for December 25.

Part 1 includes:

Hope: December 3-9

Peace: December 10-16

Both parts can be downloaded from our website at:

[FAHope.org/advent](http://FAHope.org/advent)

## Introduction from Part 1

Happy New Year! Ok, that might not make sense as January 1<sup>st</sup> is still almost a month away, but the new Church year always starts four Sundays *before* Christmas. The first season in the new Church year is called Advent. Just like the calendar year has different seasons – spring, summer, fall, and winter, so the Church year also has different seasons. The Church year was created to help us remember the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The Advent season prepares us for the coming of Jesus. The 12 days of the Christmas season celebrates the birth of Jesus. Imagine if your birthday party lasted 12 days! The next season, starting January 6<sup>th</sup> each year, is called Epiphany. During Epiphany, we remember all the ways in which Jesus showed the world that He was the Son of God.

Next, in the season of Lent we prepare for the death of Jesus by remembering the ways in which Jesus showed how much He loved us, and how we need to ask God to forgive us for the times when we haven't loved Him in the same way. The season of Lent leads us up to Good Friday, the day Jesus died.

It seems strange to call that day, "good," but it is good because Jesus chose to die to save us from our sins. We sin whenever we don't listen to God. Because of our sin, we deserve to be punished. But Jesus was the Son of God and never sinned. Even though Jesus didn't deserve to be punished, He chose to take our punishment for us. Because Jesus did this, when we pray to God and ask Him to forgive us, He always does! So now you know why we call it Good Friday.

Thankfully, that is not the end. For on the third day after Jesus' death, (1-Friday, 2-Saturday, 3-Sunday) we celebrate Easter Sunday. Yes, Jesus had died, but God showed the world that Jesus was His Son by bringing Him back to life – never to die again! Throughout the Easter season we celebrate all the times Jesus proved to His disciples and others that He was truly alive. On the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Easter Sunday, Jesus went up, alive, into Heaven. Ten days later, we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, which is the day when Jesus gave the Church the gift of the Holy Spirit. God gives this gift to all who are baptized into Jesus Christ – including you and me! The rest of the Church year is the season of Pentecost. During that time, we learn about all the ways in which Jesus has blessed and protected His people – the Church.

All of this is what makes Advent so special. As we go through this devotional for the next four weeks, we will see why the coming of Jesus as a little baby was so special. We will also look at how God had announced that Jesus was coming hundreds, if not thousands of years, before Jesus was born. What an awesome God we serve!



**Sunday, December 17 – Third Sunday in Advent: Candle of Joy**

The angel said to [the Shepherds,] “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.” – Luke 2:11

Today at our church service we lit the candle of Joy. This candle reminds us of the joy of the shepherds when they found out the message of the angels was true. They went into town and told everyone what they saw and heard.

The candle of Joy, also called the Shepherd’s candle, is pink instead of purple or blue like the others in an Advent wreath. This is a tradition that goes back many years, and no one knows for sure why this candle is pink. Most speculate that the change in color clearly highlighted the half-way point of Advent. Even though Advent is a time of repentance and preparation, we need to be reminded to give thanks to God and be joyful! The pink candle is meant to be like a warm day in the middle of winter!

When we think of being joyful, we might think it means the same as being happy. While there are many similarities between happiness and joy, we can be joyful even when we don’t feel happy. For the source of our joy comes from knowing that the Lord loves us and is always with us. The truth of God’s presence with us never changes!

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for the pink candle of Joy. We pray that it would remind us that we can find our joy in you even when we might not feel happy. Every day, help us to know how much you love us. May we also be like the shepherds and tell everyone about all the great things you do for us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Angels We Have Heard on High, verse 2*

Shepherds, why this jubilee?

Why your joyous strains prolong?

What the gladsome tidings be

Which inspire your heav’nly song?

Gloria in excelsis Deo;

Gloria in excelsis Deo.



**Saturday, December 30**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

– John 3:16-17

As we come to the end of this devotional, we will finish with one of the most famous, and most important, verses in the Bible - John 3:16. This verse is a wonderful summary of why Jesus came to earth on that first Christmas. He came

because God loves us and wants us all to be able to live with Him. But for us to live with God forever, Jesus had to take away our sins.

Our sins had separated us from God because God is Holy. God is holy because He is perfectly good. When we sin, we are no longer holy. There is nothing we can do to make ourselves holy again. The only one who was good enough to pay for our sins was Jesus. When we believe that Jesus died for our sins, He makes us holy. When we are holy, we can live with God!

This verse assures us that God wants to forgive us. God could have sent Jesus to punish us, but instead God sent Jesus to save us. What a great act of love! If you ever feel like God doesn’t care, remember that He sent Jesus so you can be with Him. Jesus loves you so much, that He was willing to die for you. But to live with God, you need to believe in Jesus. You need to trust that Jesus loves you, and you need to be willing to follow Him.

If you trust in Jesus, this verse promises that you will live with God forever! The promise of life with God is the best promise we could ever be given. And that is the promise of Christmas.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for teaching us more about you during this Advent season. Help us to always remember that you love us. Thank you for sending Jesus to save us, so that we can live with you forever! We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O Come, All Ye Faithful, verse 1*

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant;

Come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;

Come and behold Him, born the King of angels:

O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,

O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord.



## Friday, December 29

“Why were you searching for me?” [Jesus] asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”<sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying to them.<sup>51</sup> Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.<sup>52</sup> And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. – Luke 2:49-52

When Jesus was twelve years old, he went to Jerusalem with his family. This was an

important holiday, and people from all over Israel came to worship God at the temple. When the festival was over, Joseph and Mary left without Jesus. They didn’t notice because they traveled with many family members and friends from their area. There were so many people, they had assumed Jesus was with his aunts, uncles, or cousins. When they realized Jesus was not with them, they went back to Jerusalem. After three days (after all there were no phones and Jerusalem was a large city), they finally found Jesus sitting in the temple talking with those who taught God’s Word. The teachers were amazed at Jesus’ knowledge and wisdom since he was so young.

When Jesus found out His parents had been looking for Him, He told them that they should have known that He would be in the house of His Father. Of course, Jesus meant being in the house of His true Father- the temple of God. It wasn’t always easy for Mary and Joseph to know how to raise God’s Son, but Jesus honored His earthly parents by always obeying them.

Prayer: Dear God, we pray that you would give us a desire to sit in your presence and learn more about you. Help us to read your Word and talk to you in prayer. Help us to grow in our knowledge of you and in our faith in Jesus. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Joy to the World, verse 4*

He rules the world with truth and grace  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders, wonders of His love.



## Monday, December 18

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!”<sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.<sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” – Luke 1:39-45

There were many people who rejoiced at the news that Jesus was coming. Yesterday, we talked about the shepherds that ran into town and told everyone that Jesus had been born. In the verses we just read, we see that John the Baptist rejoiced about Jesus before either of them was even born! For both Jesus and John were still babies in their moms’ tummies. The Bible tells us that when the baby John heard the voice of Jesus’ mother, Mary, he leapt for joy in his mommy’s tummy. Have you ever been able to feel a baby kick before the baby has been born? It is quite a miraculous thing.

Science has shown that babies, even before they are born, can hear sounds around them and react to them. Music can make them busy or grow quiet. If you read the same book to them before they are born, they will recognize that book after they are born.

After he was born and grew up, John would tell everyone how important Jesus was. But even as a baby still inside his mommy, God allowed John to show us the joy of being in the presence of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for sending John the Baptist. We thank you for filling him with your Holy Spirit so that he could tell others about Jesus – even before he was born. We pray you would help us to tell people about Jesus, too. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, verse 4*

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death’s dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.



## Tuesday, December 19

And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.”

– Luke 1:46-49

Yesterday, we looked at how John the Baptist rejoiced in the presence of Jesus when his mother, Elizabeth, was greeted by Jesus’ mother, Mary. Today, our verses come from a

song of praise that Mary sang to God right after that happened.

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, we looked at the end of that song Mary sang. Today, we are looking at the start of that song. This song is often called *The Magnificat*. “Magnificat” is the first word of the song in Latin. The word means to magnify or glorify. In this song, Mary expresses her joy for all the things that God will do for His people through her son, Jesus.

We, too, should use this time of Advent to magnify and glorify God. We should remember to give thanks to Him for all the good things He has done for us. We can thank God for little things in our life and big things. We can also praise God by singing hymns or Christmas songs at church or at home. May we never forget to thank and praise God!

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for the song of praise that Mary sang to you. We pray that you will help us to always remember to praise and thank you also. May our hearts always worship you. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O How Shall I Receive Thee, verse 3*

Love caused Thine incarnation,  
Love brought Thee down to me;  
Thy thirst for my salvation; Procured my liberty.  
O love beyond all telling, That led Thee to embrace,  
In love all love excelling, Our lost and fallen race.



## Thursday, December 28

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.<sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. – 1 John 4:8-9

People like to talk about love. Almost everyone would say love is important—even the most important thing in the world. Many would say that love should guide what we do in life. We all want to be loved by others and should want to show love to others.

But what is love? After all, if we like to talk about it, if love is the most important thing in the world, and certainly if we think love should determine the things we do, shouldn’t we make sure we know what love is? Sadly, many people think that love is whatever you want it to be. They think that everyone is free to define love in their own way.

However, the Bible clearly defines love for us. In today’s verses, the Apostle John tells us that “God is love.” This means that if we want to know what true love is, we need to look to God. Everything God does, He does in love. Everything God tells us to do is out of His love for us. This means that everything that goes against God’s Word is not love.

Unfortunately, it is easy to get this backwards and think our ideas about love should define God. Thankfully, God has given us a clear definition of love – Jesus Christ. When we look at Jesus, we see the purest love earth has ever seen. If we want to be more loving, we need to be more like Jesus. To love others, we need to do what Jesus did and live the way Jesus wants us to live. Whenever we follow Jesus, we know that we are loving others. It is impossible to truly and rightly love others without first showing love to Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for your gift of love. We thank you for all those who love us, and we ask that you would help us to love others more. We thank you for showing us what true love is by sending us Jesus. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Savior of the Nations, Come, verse 1*

Savior of the nations, come,  
Virgin’s Son, make here Thy home!  
Marvel now, O heav’n and earth,  
That the Lord chose such a birth.



### Wednesday, December 27

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. <sup>2</sup>I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. <sup>3</sup>You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, <sup>4</sup>I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations."

– Psalm 89:1-4

In this Psalm, we're told to always sing songs about the Lord's great love. When we sing

about Jesus at Christmas, we are thanking God for His love. The psalms were songs written before Jesus was born that praised God for the love showed in His promise to send His people a Savior.

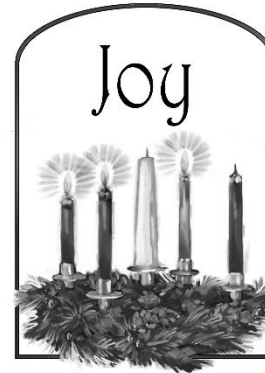
This psalm praised God for promising to send a king who would be a descendant of David. David was the most famous of all the kings of Israel. About 1,000 years before Jesus was born, God promised David, "I will make your throne firm through all the generations."

This promise is why Matthew's Gospel begins, "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham." A genealogy is a list of a person's ancestors, like a family tree. We might not understand why this list is important, but it was very important to the people of Israel. God said His promise would be true "through all generations." At the end of his list, Matthew explains, "Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah." He was showing the people that God kept His promise throughout all the generations by sending them Jesus, a descendant of David, to reign on David's throne forever.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for keeping your promises throughout all the generations. We thank you for your faithfulness to our ancestors, and we thank you that you will be faithful to the future generations as well. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

*Hymn: Silent Night! Holy Night! verse 3*

Silent night! Holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.



### Wednesday, December 20

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, ...Magi [or wisemen] from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ...<sup>9</sup> they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they

opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. – from Matthew 2:1-11

I'm sure most of us have heard about the three wisemen that came to worship Jesus, but did you know the Bible doesn't ever say that there were three of them? We usually think of three because of the three gifts that they brought. These seem like kind of strange gifts to us today. While the value of gold is obvious to us, frankincense and myrrh were also very expensive. They were gifts fit for a King.

Although Jesus' parents were not rich or famous, the wisemen (Magi) knew that Jesus was a very important King. It is likely that they knew about the teachings of the Old Testament prophet, Daniel, who was a prisoner in the land of Persia long before Jesus was born. God gave Daniel visions about when Jesus would be born. When the Magi saw the signs that Daniel said would happen, they followed the star to Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for the gifts of the wisemen that show us how important Jesus is. We pray that we would worship Jesus with our best gifts, too. Thank you for leading all of us to Jesus. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

*Hymn: What Child Is This, verse 3*

So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh;  
Come, peasant, king, to own Him.  
The King of kings salvation brings;  
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.  
Raise, raise the song on high; The virgin sings her lullaby;  
Joy, joy, for Christ is born, The babe, the son of Mary!



## Thursday, December 21

“This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup>Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” – Nehemiah 8:9b-10

Today’s verses come from the book of Nehemiah. He lived just after the time of Daniel—over 400 years before Jesus. Nehemiah

was also a prisoner in Persia, but God allowed him, and many others, to go back to the land of Israel. When they got to Jerusalem, there was a lot of work to do. Seventy years prior, the Babylonians had destroyed almost everything in the city: the homes, the city walls, and even the temple of God.

When Nehemiah and the people started to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, they found the book of God’s Law. This was most likely the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It had been lost for many years, and few of the people had ever heard it. When the priests read it to the people, the people cried loudly. They cried because they were happy to hear it, but they also cried because they hadn’t been obeying God’s Word.

However, God told them not to cry. He wanted them to know that hearing His Word should cause us to rejoice and be happy. He told them to have a big feast and give gifts to those who didn’t have good things to eat or drink. This is a lot like how we celebrate Christmas. We give gifts and share meals with each other to show how the birth of Jesus fills us with joy and happiness.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you that you have given us the Bible. Help us to always be filled with joy and happiness when we read your Word. On Christmas, as we give gifts to others and open our own gifts, we pray we would think about Jesus – the greatest gift of all. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Joy to the World, verse 2*

Joy to the world! The Savior reigns: Let men their songs employ,  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,  
Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.



## Tuesday, December 26

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14

Most of the passages in the Bible that tell us about the birth of Jesus are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Almost all the Bible verses we use in Christmas plays come from those two books of the Bible. The other two Gospels, Mark and John, don’t include a narrative of the birth of Jesus. Their historical accounts start around the time Jesus began His ministry.

Even though the Gospel of John doesn’t start with an account of Mary and Joseph, or the angels and shepherds, John does tell us what God did when He sent Jesus to earth as a little baby. Today’s verse says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” “The Word” is a way in which John refers to Jesus. We call the Bible “God’s Word” because God used the writers of the Bible to tell us about Him. John calls Jesus “The Word Made Flesh” because Jesus not only told us about God, but He was God. Through Jesus, God spoke to His people directly.

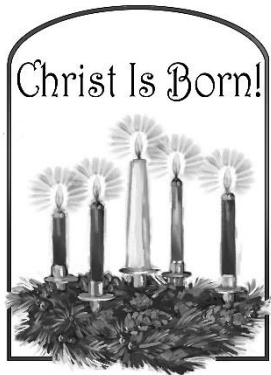
Some people tried to tell Jesus that they loved God even though they didn’t believe what Jesus was teaching. Jesus told them it is impossible to love God and not believe Him because He is the very Son of God. His Word is the same as God’s Word! So those who didn’t listen to Jesus were rejecting the Word of God. Jesus came to show us God’s glory and to teach us God’s truth.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for showing us who you are by sending Jesus. We pray that we would always be happy to hear the things you teach us in your Word. We thank you that your Word is always true. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O Come, All Ye Faithful, verse 3*

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv’n;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him,  
Christ, the Lord.





## Monday, December 25 – Christmas Day

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world...<sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped

him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. – Luke 2:1-7

Christmas Day is finally here! Maybe it seems like you have been waiting a long time for Christmas to come this year. Can you imagine what it was like for the people of Israel? They had been waiting for hundreds of years for the Messiah to come.

And yet, when Jesus finally came, His coming went mostly unnoticed. Perhaps He didn't come with enough fanfare, after all, shouldn't a king be born in a palace or at least to an important family? Perhaps He was ignored simply because He was a child. For even if He was the Messiah, it would be years before He would be able to rescue Israel from its enemies. Even though there was a lot of activity during the birth of Jesus, the wonder of His birth seemed to quickly fade.

The same thing can happen today. In the excitement of Christmas, it is easy to overlook Jesus. Christmas is a busy time, filled with many good things, but even good things can distract us from what is most important. This Christmas let us make sure that even in the busyness of the season we keep our thoughts on Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we thank you for this Christmas Day. We thank you for the time spent celebrating with family and friends. We thank you for presents and good food, but most of all, we thank you for Jesus – the greatest gift of all. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

**Hymn:** *Silent Night! Holy Night! verse 2*

Silent night! Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight;  
Glories stream from heaven afar, Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia,  
Christ, the Savior, is born! Christ, the Savior, is born!



## Friday, December 22

[Jesus said,] “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” – John 15:9-11

Yesterday, we talked about how God wanted the people to rejoice when they heard His Word being read. In today's verses, Jesus is telling His disciples that we should also rejoice

in hearing God's commands to us.

Jesus tells us that God's commands are not meant to be a burden to us. God isn't just bossing us around. God gives us His commands because He loves us. He cares so much about us that He doesn't want us to do things that would hurt ourselves or others.

Jesus teaches that if we really love God, if we trust God, we will want to obey God. More than that, Jesus says if we follow God's commands, they will lead us to true joy. There is nothing better for us than to follow God, because no one loves us more than God loves us. God loves us more than we love ourselves! God has given us His commands because He wants to be able to fill our lives with all the good things that only come from Him.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we thank you for teaching us through your commands. Even in your commands, help us to see your love for us. We pray that we will trust you to always lead us to good things. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

**Hymn:** *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come, verses 1 & 2*

1 From heav'n above to earth I come,  
To bear good news to ev'ry home,  
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,  
Whereof I now will gladly sing.

2 This night to you is born a child,  
The chosen Virgin's Infant mild.  
And He, a child of lowly birth  
Shall be the joy of all the earth.



### Saturday, December 23

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. – Philippians 4:4-5

When the Apostle Paul tells us we are to rejoice always in the Lord, it sounds impossible. After all, we don't always feel joyful. However, Paul is encouraging us to put joy into action even when we don't feel like it. In fact, our need to rejoice might be greatest when we don't feel joyful.

When Paul and his friend, Silas, first visited the church in Philippi (Acts 16:16-40), they were unjustly arrested and thrown into prison. Instead of being angry or bitter, they chose to rejoice in the Lord. They sang songs of praise to God. When they did that, God showed up. He caused all the jail cells to come open. The prisoners could have escaped, but they didn't. They stayed because Paul wanted God to set the prison guard free. Immediately, they let the guard know they were all still there, and then Paul and Silas told the prison guard about Jesus. The guard and his whole family were baptized that very night. All these people came to know Jesus because Paul and Silas chose to rejoice, even when they didn't feel very happy.

Paul reminds us that even though our feelings of joy can come and go, the source of our joy is always the same: "The Lord is near." The promise of God's presence is always a reason to rejoice. Whether we are at home or at school, in church or even in jail, the Lord is near.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you always being with us. We pray you would help us to remember to rejoice in you, even when we don't feel like it. Help us to share the joy of knowing you with all those around us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice, verse 3*

Good Christian friends, rejoice  
With heart and soul and voice:  
Now ye need not fear the grave;  
Jesus Christ was born to save!  
Calls you one and calls you all  
To gain His everlasting hall.  
Christ was born to save!  
Christ was born to save!



### Sunday, December 24 – Fourth Sunday in Advent: Candle of Love

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). – Luke 2:13-14

Today at our church service we lit the candle of Love. The Love candle represents the love that God showed to us by sending His Son, Jesus.

One of the most important ways we can show someone that we love them is to be with them.

We enjoy being in the presence of the people we love. We might even drive for hours or fly across the country just to visit those that are most special to us. That is what God did when He sent us Jesus. However, He didn't just come to visit us, He came to live with us.

Throughout the Bible, Jesus is called by some very special names. One of the most special is the name "Immanuel," which means "God with us." Jesus, as God's Son, came to show us who God is, and Jesus, as Mary's Son, came to be with us. Because Jesus was true God and true man, He is the only one who can truly be our Immanuel.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for sending Jesus as Immanuel. We thank you that you showed us how much you love us by coming to earth to be with us. We pray that you would help us to show others how much we love them, and how much you love them, simply by spending time with them. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Hymn: *O Little Town of Bethlehem, verse 4*

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in,  
Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Immanuel.