

Advent Bible Study

The Light of Grace

Dec. 16 Session III

Joy: Elizabeth

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,

Your servant Elizabeth and her unborn son, the prophet John, rejoiced at the greeting of Mary, the mother of our Lord.

We give you praise and thanks for the many earthly joys of this Advent season, but above all, we praise you for the gift of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

By your grace, through faith in Jesus, we share the joy of Elizabeth and John.

We know joy in our Lord right now and will rejoice in his presence for all eternity.

Lead us to share this joy with others through acts of love and service and through our witness to our Savior.

We pray that by the power of your Spirit, they, too, will come to rejoice in Jesus.

Hear our prayer and accept our praise in Jesus' name.

Amen

What makes someone a joyful person? It is not the absence of pain, or suffering, or any of the other miseries common to humanity. In general, joyful people seem to retain their joy despite their personal challenges. They seem deeply centered, with a core of strength that allows them to engage fully with the world in all its laughter and woe, without being shaken or overwhelmed. Christian joy, like hope, peace, and love is a grace from God.

Scripture reveals Christ as a person of joy, despite being a refugee, poor, homeless, hungry, tired and pursued at all hours of the day and night by those who sought healing. At the Last Supper, Jesus referred to his own joy, even as he shared his final words of love and teaching with his apostles: "These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." John 15:11

Isaiah 35:1-10

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 1:39-45

Elizabeth's story is quite brief. And because of its brevity, her story may seem diminished in the grander scheme of worldly events. In her time, the powerful Herod rules over Judea, even as the powerful do over many lands today. And Herod and other peoples might consider themselves blessed. They would have descendants who would also seem to have blessed lives of their own. Some of these descendants may even assume their own positions of power in life. By all appearances, they seem to be the people who are graced with blessing.

But Elizabeth lives isolated and concealed. She lives in the dark shadows of all that is happening in her world. Even though she is descended from priests in the line of Aaron, even though her own personal character and life testify to her faithfulness, she bears what she and all in her time would consider a horrible curse. She bears the stigma of being a woman barren and childless. Blessings are far from her.

Elizabeth bore all these feelings of being shunned and shamed, perhaps even becoming angry and resentful. She was reduced to a state of worthlessness. She could not see a future of joy or blessing. Instead, in the lowly trenches of life, she only saw doors being shut, leaving her in isolation. Her heart was only filled with lament.

Why did she wait five months before leaving her secluded, isolated life behind closed doors? Why, indeed! Perhaps it was because she knew that if she went out and tried telling others, no one would believe her. But given the fulfillment of the promise of joy, Elizabeth may well have had a more promising and joyous reason in waiting to share the good news. She would wait for the time when all the people might rejoice with her.