

The background of the image is a gradient from a deep blue night sky at the top to a warm orange and yellow sunset at the bottom. A large, bright, multi-pointed star is positioned in the upper left quadrant. The bottom of the image shows the dark silhouette of rolling hills and mountains, with some small, light-colored plants or trees visible on the right side.

Comfort & Joy

DEVOTIONALS FROM DENVER SEMINARY
FOR THE 2022 ADVENT SEASON



“O, tidings of comfort and joy.” It’s hard to imagine a Christmas season without that familiar refrain echoing in our ears. Taken from a carol God’s people have sung for over three hundred years, the possibility of comfort and joy touches deep chords of hope in our hearts. Thinking back over the past twelve months, our need for both comfort and joy comes into bold relief. Like every year, this year we’ve needed God’s comfort to sustain us through the losses and disappointments of a world that still groans in anticipation of the day when the Lord Jesus will return to make everything new. And like every year, this year we’ve experienced the unexplainable, yet undeniable, joy that comes when we lean into the Lord’s comforting presence in our lives.

Sometimes the movement from comfort to joy is surprisingly abrupt. While playing with one of our grandchildren recently, abject despair came upon her when the head fell off a toy and rolled under the couch. But squeals of joy followed those howls of pain when Papa put the head back on, especially since I put it on backwards! Other times, however, in the midst of pain, loss, and uncertainty, even the possibility of joy seems out of reach.

Those dark times are when we most need someone to remind us of God’s presence. Tidings of comfort and joy come from those willing to enter into our pain with healing and hopeful words. Not platitudes or explanations or speculations about “why” something has happened. Just reminders that God is “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3) and that “weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5b).

Our prayer is that these devotionals will bring both comfort and joy to your heart this Christmas season.


Mark Young



What Is Your Favorite Christmas Present?

“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?”

I Thessalonians 2:19

When I was growing up as a middle-class American boy, it seemed that each year after Christmas some grownup would ask me what my favorite present had been. I seldom thought about how fortunate I was to receive presents at all, and especially multiple presents from which I could select my favorite. One year, it was a new basketball; another time, a book of sheet music of some of my favorite popular tunes that I could play on the piano. Once, I even got a new bicycle at Christmas, which was very special.

I can confidently say, however, that I would have had no appreciation for the lyrics in Mariah Carey's hit song, “All I Want for Christmas Is You,” had it been released in 1964 when I was nine, rather than in 1994 when it soared to the top of the charts, and I was thirty-nine! In 1964, I had heard Elvis Presley's brand new rendition of “I'll Have a Blue Christmas Without You,” but its pathos was similarly lost on me.

Maybe if I had grown up separated against my will from my family, I would have learned at a younger age that people can also be presents. I remember the joy on my father's face (and the shock on my mother's!) when my wife and I “smuggled” my younger brother home one Christmas from his military service overseas. But the apostle Paul refers to all the new Christians in Thessalonica as his joy. He compares them to a glorious crown for his evangelistic ministry that Jesus would give him when He returned. Yet the crown is not a separate prize for Paul's work with these fresh converts; they themselves are the crown!

As a sixty-seven-year-old, I have long since given up looking forward to the kinds of presents you can unwrap from under a tree, and I have come to understand how precious the gifts my wife, children, and grandchildren are at Christmas. But I suspect I still have a lot to learn about valuing fellow believers outside of my family as presents, especially those who have come to faith under my influence.

*Craig L. Blomberg, PhD
Distinguished Professor Emeritus of New Testament*



December 2

God With Us in Grief

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:4

There seems to be something nostalgic about the Christmas season that many anticipate, especially as the temperature drops, the days become shorter, and the lights begin to twinkle all around.

And yet, for many, this also seems to be a season of mourning rather than dancing (Ecclesiastes 3:4). We mourn our broken relationships. We mourn when we confront death after losing loved ones. We mourn our unmet expectations. We mourn when faced with our sins. So how is it possible to experience such intense sorrow and grief while we watch our Advent candles dance with hope, peace, love, and joy?

I wonder if this is how many of us end up attempting to “fake-it-till-we-make-it.” We commit to pressing forward, pasting on a smile to cover up our brokenness, and allowing others only to see our jolliest selves because it feels like there is no room for sadness or lament at Christmastime. We ought not mourn, especially in this season, as we anxiously await the day when we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus, who came to set us free from our sin and shame. So, we dull and numb our grief, wandering through the days, wondering what’s the point.

However, Jesus gives a different perspective on this kind of sorrow. One day, as He taught the crowd of people in front of Him, He boldly proclaimed, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). What Jesus knew, and what most of us have experienced, is that there are two promises here. The first is not if we will mourn, but when. The second is that when we mourn, He will comfort us.

Advent is a season of paradox when we can experience mourning and receive comfort. It is in our state of mourning that we are comforted by the One whose birth we remember and celebrate at Christmas—Jesus, God’s Son who came from heaven as Immanuel, God With Us. It is by His presence that we are reminded that we have not been abandoned in our grief. Even when our circumstances remain the same, the gift of Jesus’ presence provides not only comfort, but it is through Jesus that we can experience the hope, peace, love, and joy that we long for, not only during Christmas, but throughout our lives.

Lisa Alvino

Student, Master of Biblical and Theological Studies



Joy Complete

*“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete.”*

John 15:11

“Just one more!” This is often the plight of my six-year-old niece, Addison. Whether swinging on a swing, picking out a pumpkin in the fall, or sharing a snack, it’s always, “just one more...push! minute! piece!” To Addison, nothing is complete without that “just one more” that causes her expectation of the experience to be met.

As we age, this “just one more” mentality can invade the patchwork of our lives as “if only...” or “I wish...” Though not typically ill-motivated, this desire for more remains at the forefront of our minds, compelling us to seek the end of a story unknown. We reside in the friction of the unknown while desiring the notion of completeness.

This posture permeates our spiritual lives, too. We live in the tension of incompleteness as we rejoice in the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection, yet wait hopefully in the completeness of His anticipated return.

As I read the words of Jesus in John 15, I imagine the disciples postured like children, confused by what is to come and yearning to echo, “Lord, just one more...moment in your presence! explanation of what is to come! opportunity to show my love!”

Still, in verse 11, Jesus instructs, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Though Jesus knew of the garden of Gethsemane, of the betrayal of His dearest companions, of His grueling death by crucifixion, He, for the first and only time in the Gospels, differentiates between “my joy” and “your joy” in the same contexts, offering insight as to the way we may find completeness in the tension of our yearning.

Jesus’ joy stems from obeying and remaining in His Father’s love. He provides both instruction and example that, by remaining in Him, we may bear fruit that will last (v. 8, 16) and experience the abundance of His love (v. 20). His life, death, and resurrection offer us access to the everlasting love of the Father and complete joy.

Our joy, like that of the disciples, is often embroiled in our circumstances. If you sense the tension of the Christmas season—the incompleteness of family strife, holiday shopping, lights to be hung—Jesus invites you into the greater story of His joy—the joy everlasting, the joy abundant, the joy abiding, the joy uncircumstantial, the joy complete.

Ryan Dougherty
Donor Relations Associate

Responsive Love

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

I Peter 1:8–9

Peter writes to a second generation of Christians in exile who, like us, never saw Jesus in the flesh with their physical eyes. They heard the stories of the babe born in Bethlehem who was to be called Immanuel—God With Us—and how He fulfilled the long-awaited prophecies.

They heard how Jesus astonished the Jewish world by claiming to be one with the Father, and to be the only one who has seen the Father. They heard about His teaching on the Kingdom of God and how He accepted being identified as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. They heard about His humiliating death on the cross as He took onto Himself the sin and darkness of all humanity. They heard how He endured the judgment of that sin in His own flesh, died, and rose triumphantly from the grave, destroying the sting of death and condemnation of sin for all humanity once and for all.

By the work of the Spirit, the scales fell off their eyes, and they saw Jesus. They saw Jesus with the eyes of their heart. They understood with a deeper knowing than what seeing someone in the flesh can offer. They knew who He was and that He was the source of eternal hope and the embodiment of life as it was meant to be. They believed that He came to them from the Father and that He had opened the way to communion with the God they had always believed in and longed to know, and they loved Him.

Their love for Jesus, as is ours, is a responsive love. By the Spirit, the love of God was poured into their hearts and into ours. Do we feel at times that our love is lacking or inadequate? Do we sometimes experience that we don't love God enough? Because our love for God has always been and always will be a responsive love, the answer to our seeming lack of love is to look and see Jesus. We love because He first loved us, and we are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy!

Paula Tipton, PhD
Associate Professor of Counseling



Hope Does Not Disappoint

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 41:10

Despair need not rule. Let's talk about hope. The eighth-century BCE prophet Isaiah invites us to consider responding in faith to current circumstances of despair. His words to those deported and living in exile in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem are words of tenderness and hope. Though the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah focus on judgment, with only glimpses of deliverance, the second section of Isaiah (chapters 40–55) changes tone, focusing primarily on deliverance and restoration through a servant. This servant, we will ultimately come to see in the New Testament, is Jesus.

The nation of Judah wasted many years disregarding Yahweh's commands and turning to the surrounding nations for military assistance. She lost trust in Yahweh. Now in a strange land due to continued sin and absent any physical remembrance of her God, those in exile are given a pledge of God's presence, power, and help. These three promises constitute hope.

God's mercy is continually revealed in His forgiveness and presence. His desire is to be close to His people—closer than the air we breathe. And this is why Isaiah prophesies of Jesus, the baby, the coming one, literally “with us God.” We have no need to live in fear though we live in fearful times. He is near: He is with us. And this Advent season, I pray that our hearts are warmed by this reality.

Yahweh is both near and powerful. No one can compare to Yahweh's strength and greatness. The incomparable God is your God. He is the one who will strengthen and help you despite the overwhelming circumstances of your life. He is trustworthy. You can count on His “righteous right hand” to do what is right in all circumstances.

Our ultimate hope is in a person. And it is with great joy that we open our hearts and minds to this baby, Jesus, born long ago, with this promise to us:

I am with you

I am your God

I will strengthen you and help you

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand

May your Christmas be filled with hope as you meditate on these promises.

Linda Foote Brown, MA

Member, Board of Trustees; Adjunct Professor of Old Testament

I Will Rise

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalm 16:11

So often we look for life outside of God. We seek it in possessions. We seek it in accolades, in success, in career advancement. We may even seek it in particularly insidious ways, in striving to do good things for God while failing to recognize the importance of being with Him. We gorge ourselves—on media, entertainment, food, even on exercise simply to find something “worth living for.” And when these things fail to satisfy, at least they numb us, right?

As Augustine tells us, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. They have hungers and longings that, when not satisfied in God, will continuously search for something else to slake their thirst. None of us is immune. Too often we fail to avoid the hamster wheel—instead we simply baptize it.

In our hurry to fill our lives with things that feel “meaningful”—that will give us a sense of joy, pleasure, or “life”—we overlook the very thing—the One—who is Life Himself.

When we slow down enough to be with Him, when we cease our striving and our hurry enough simply to be, we are then able to receive what He has been longing to give us all along: joy. Life. Eternal pleasures.

Aren't these what we so deeply yearn for? Don't our souls hunger and thirst for these? To be filled to overflowing with joy? To be assured beyond doubt that we have life? To experience truly good pleasures forevermore?

We can have these things—in Him. And yet, we receive them when we don't merely seek the things themselves. We receive them when we love and are with the Source of these gifts. The Giver Himself.

Here in the Advent season we remember that God in Jesus Christ has made the Father known to us. Immanuel: God is with us. Jesus Christ is the Way—He is the Path of Life. And He fills us with joy eternal since He has filled us with His Spirit—His presence is *always* with us.

As the busyness of another holiday season threatens to steal our joy, life, and pleasure—and as the culture around us offers us hollow alternatives—may we take time to be with our Immanuel. He is with us. Let us be with Him, and humbly receive the joy, pleasure, and life He richly supplies.

Jessica Schroeder, MA

Alumna; Alumni Relations Associate; Administrative Assistant to the VP of SLEM



Sadie's Psalm

*"You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence."*

Psalm 16:11

We had just pulled into town to begin our new life at Denver Seminary. Before unloading the moving truck, my wife, Sadie, and I thought we'd take our youngest to the playground to reward him for being such a trooper on the long trip from Arkansas. There was only one other family at the park. We struck up a conversation with them to find out they too had moved from Arkansas and had even attended the university where I taught. Thinking we must then be kindred spirits, they invited us to their church, which they called "a charismatic Anglican church." As a very uncharismatic Baptist, I deflected by making a bad joke about oxymorons and politely said, "Maybe," with no real intention of visiting.

That Sunday, however, we had nowhere else to go, so we nervously made our way to worship with the charismatic Anglicans. For various reasons, we were in tears for most of the service. But what got us the most happened during communion. While giving Sadie the bread, the priest prophesied over her: "God says He will make your boundary lines fall in pleasant places, that He will make known to you the paths of life, and that He will fill you with joy in His Presence." Hearing those words, Sadie and I were both undone. That was the very psalm the Lord had given to her over a decade before as a promise of His faithfulness during a season of personal struggle. Ever since Sadie found those auspicious words, Psalm 16 has been "her psalm." For this reason, we were overjoyed when we realized that out of the 150 psalms that priest could have cited to her, the Spirit had led him to quote "Sadie's Psalm."

It turns out that this Psalm was also timely in another pivotal charismatic service: Pentecost. There, in Acts 2, Peter stands up to address the rumor that the Church was drunk. In that defense, he goes on to preach the gospel to the bystanders. Within that sermon, the Lord also led Peter to reach for "Sadie's Psalm." In a twist, Peter informs the audience that King David didn't write these words about himself; he wrote them about Jesus. Therefore, quoting Psalm 16, Peter declares:

*“David said about him:
‘I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest in hope,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
you will not let your holy one see decay.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.”*

(Acts 2:25–28)

Perhaps this Advent season, the Lord wants you to hear this psalm too—whether as a promise in a time of suffering or an affirmation in a new move. Whatever the case, Peter reminds us that our abundant joy is based not on our circumstances, but on the presence of our Creator; the resurrection of our Lord, and the power of His Holy Spirit. May God be with you today and fill you with the type of joy that made David dance before the Lord and that compelled Peter to proclaim the power of His redemption.

*Joseph R. Dodson, PhD
Dr. Craig L. Blomberg Endowed Chair of New Testament*





Rejoicing Like Habakkuk

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

Habakkuk 3:17–18

Has there ever been a season in your life when you took stock of all that you have relationally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, professionally, and materially? Have you done it in a hard season? Perhaps during one marked by loss—job loss, loss of a loved one, loss of health, loss of a felt connection with the Lord? Did you see your lack? Did you experience all the brokenness of yourself, others, and the world? Did you feel the depression and anxiety of grief wrapping around your mind and body like a heavy blanket or descending like a dark storm cloud covering everything in your sight? Perhaps you’re currently in the midst of one of those seasons.

I imagine this is what Habakkuk was in the midst of when he proclaimed, “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

He was in an utter state of disbelief. How could the LORD let His people experience such humiliation and degradation at the hands of the Babylonians? A people who clearly had no regard for the Creator or His creation, let alone His chosen people, Israel. How could the LORD, the Redeemer of Jacob and the One who provides, expose His people to such violence and allow such lack? Is He a good God? Does He keep His covenant? Can He be trusted?

Despite his circumstances, Habakkuk says, yes! the LORD is good, and He is faithful; He is most trustworthy! Habakkuk chooses to rejoice in the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Though their circumstances led many to doubt and turn away from their Savior, he remembered the faithfulness of the LORD in days long ago. He knew that God alone could save.

I pray dear brothers and sisters that, when your present circumstances are bleak, or when you see the brokenness in our world, like Habakkuk, you will remember how our Lord and Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, came into the world to save it and us with it. In such remembrance, I pray you will rejoice in the Lord and that you will be filled with joy in God your Savior:

Mary Puckett
Student, Master of Divinity

The Holy Spirit in Advent

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Luke 1:41

Advent rightly focuses us on the coming of the promised Messiah. The comfort and joy from both the promise and its fulfillment are incalculable. As usual, however, the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in all that God’s people anticipate and experience through Jesus, the Christ. The Holy Spirit is mentioned seven times in the first two chapters of Luke’s Gospel. Elizabeth was promised that her baby would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary was assured that through the Holy Spirit she would bear a child while still a virgin. The Spirit filled Elizabeth when she saw and blessed Mary. Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit to prophesy about John’s future role with the Messiah. The Holy Spirit was on Simeon as he anticipated and then experienced the newborn Christ.

The comfort and joy we experience because of Jesus are not mere sensations stimulated by fond ideas or memories. They literally come from God—the Holy Spirit—and draw us into the current, living reality of who Jesus is and what He has done. In John 14:16, Jesus speaks of the Spirit as a *parakletos*, which refers to one who gives encouragement, help, or comfort. In Galatians 5:22, Paul lists joy as one of the fruits of the Spirit. Advent comfort and joy *are* because the Holy Spirit draws us into the real, living, vibrant life and love of the Father and the Son. Advent is also about the Holy Spirit! Advent is deeply Trinitarian.

All this may sound nicely theological, but it has far-reaching implications. In Luke 1–2 we consistently see the Holy Spirit bringing God’s presence and power into contexts of impossibility or hopelessness, working against the grain of normal human patterns, circumstances, and expectations. The Holy Spirit’s presence and work surrounding the birth of our Lord gives us comfort, joy, assurance, hope (the list could go on!) beyond anything we could expect, predict, or manufacture on our own. They are gifts from God that surprise us and change us. Since Jesus promised the expanded ministry of the Holy Spirit to His disciples upon His ascension, we can expect the Spirit to work in our lives with the same unexpected and abnormal comfort and joy. May we pay attention to that, delight in that, and be different because of the Holy Spirit’s work this Advent season!

Don Payne, PhD

Vice President of Academic Affairs; Academic Dean; Professor of Theology



Breaking News

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

John 14:27

Breaking news. These two words have been a daily part of my life over the last few years while working on Capitol Hill. Collectively, our nation has survived contentious elections, impeachment trials, Supreme Court rulings, race riots, January 6, Covid-19, masking, and vaccine debates. It is exhausting just thinking about it all.

Of course, the last election was not the first contentious one the world has ever seen. Covid-19 was not the first pandemic. History has taught us that the world is full of suffering, division, and pain. There will always be something to fear. There has been and always will be breaking news.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, He broke bread with his disciples and shared some of His own breaking news. He was leaving. John recorded His words for us, “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come” (John 13:33). The disciples were not only losing their Messiah, they were losing their friend.

Knowing the pain this would cause His friends, Jesus reassured them that they would not be alone. He would send them a comforter, the Holy Spirit, and the promise that one day He would come again to get them. As a caring father would do, Jesus left them with another promise for their troubled hearts. John 14:27 states, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Early in my faith journey, I found this verse, wrote it on a sticky note, and put it on the dashboard of my car. I was single and lonely, experiencing a great deal of fear about my future. I was new enough in my faith that I was unaware of the context of the verse. All I knew was that I had a suffering heart and needed to believe that Jesus could give me peace.

I have matured as a follower of Christ and John 14:27 has become a verse my heart continues to rely upon when I hear breaking news. As we collectively long for the Messiah's return during the season of Advent, may we cling to the promise of Jesus, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.”

*Lisa Schultz, MDiv
Alumna*

Happiness and Joy

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Galatians 5:22–23

What's the difference between happiness and joy?

“Happiness” comes from the root “hap,” which means chance. Happiness is circumstantial. Happiness happens when life goes the way we want it to go. Like a Christmas Day where everybody shows up, gets along, and there's no drama.

But there are so many moments when life doesn't happen the way we want!

Joy is more than happiness. The Old Testament describes joy as a quality of life as well as an emotion. Many psalms illustrate joy as celebrating God's character despite circumstances. Shouts of joy after an expensively fought battle. Joy that comes in the morning, following a night of mourning. Garments of joy that replace sackcloth.

In the New Testament, joy is often expressed as ecstasy, a feeling of amazement, an uninhibited response to God's grace and presence in our days—like the tidings of “joy” brought by the angels at the birth of Christ. Joy is also connected to hope, love, and a perspective that sees beyond the immediate to the eventual, as New Testament writers look toward the resolution of their anguish and toward heaven.

Joy is also listed among the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23, those qualities that God grows in us so that we resemble Him. The fruit of joy is confidence in God's character, despite circumstances—despite what happens. Joy is the conviction that God is in control of every detail of our lives even when those details appear to be out of control. Such an understanding helps us comprehend James' exhortation to “count it all joy” when we face tough times (James 1:2).

In the midst of the unpredictable, joy offers strength. We're somehow hopeful. Clear. Confident. We still cry and fear and yearn. But beneath all these feelings, joy is the ability to hold up because we know we are being held up.

Joy embraces real life, not the nice version we thought we signed up for. Joy is way more than the happiness that happens when life happens to go the way we want. Joy reveals to us what we believe about God, and to those who are watching and wondering, joy reveals how we'll respond when life happens to let us down.

When Christmas Day turns sideways by unmet expectations or arguments gone awry, joy boldly redirects our gaze to the reason behind the celebration and grows our confidence in His character.

*Elisa Morgan, MDiv
Alumna; Member, Board of Trustees*

Victory over it All

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”

James 1:2–3

Marking the birth of our Lord with revelry and good cheer, we often forget that, for many people, Advent is not a joyous occasion. Across the globe, the holiday season brings grief, despair, and depression upon people as the trials of life fall upon the world. The painful suffering of humanity's various trials obscures the good news of Christmas. The beauty of the world is marred by the devastation of the Fall. Trials and tribulations reach into our lives and steal our joy.

Yet, we read in James 1 that we ought to consider these trials joy. They are not good and joyful things. These evils, like all evil, are not designed for good. They are not part of God's good design of creation. They entered creation at humanity's fall to damage and destroy us. They remain a part of Satan's plan to sabotage humanity and dismantle the divine plan. And James counsels us to consider them as joy.

This seemingly strange Christian approach to trials is integral to the joy and comfort of Advent. James explains that we consider it joy because of the faith-produced endurance. God's victory over evil offers so much more than we often realize. Evil is designed for our demise. Yet, God's victory over evil allows good to come from it. That which Satan uses for destruction, God victoriously works for the good. God's victory enables this truth—these are good tidings of great joy at Christmas.

The babe we joyously celebrate is the one that overcomes and defeats evil. Jesus, born of the virgin Mary on the first Christmas, will put all His enemies under His feet. He has overcome the world and grants us faith by which we, too, share in His victory. Yet, our trials remind us that God's victory awaits its culmination when our last enemy, death, will be no more. While we wait for the eradication of evil, James calls us to a perspective in light of this divine victory. Our God-given faith will produce endurance in the face of testing and trials that seek to destroy us.

This Christmas, as we face the trials and testing of life, may we recall these words of James. May we look to the babe of Christmas, to the One that will defeat our enemies and bring evil's reign to an end and find comfort and joy in our Savior:

David Hionides, PhD

Director of Institutional Research and Educational Systems

Companionship with God

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:9

What’s something you can’t live without? Maybe it’s your morning cup of coffee. Maybe it’s your medications. Or maybe it’s your favorite book. But if you’re like me, the clear winner is the smartphone.

Every morning, I wake up to the sound of the alarm vibrating from my smartphone. After shutting off the alarm, I check the time and weather on my digital companion. Even as I walk around the house, the phone follows me. I never know when I’ll need it to look up a recipe, check my kids’ schedule, or respond to student inquiries. My phone goes with me even when I’m on the road. Even a well-trodden path feels more secure when I have Google Maps to estimate my ETAs and potential delays. Not many things will make me feel so insecure as not knowing where my phone is!

What’s amazing is that it is this same kind of omniscient, omnipresent companionship that God promises us through the words of Joshua 1:9. God spoke these words of assurance as He charged Joshua with the task of leading His people into the promised land. Before Joshua were battles to be won, leaders to unite, and a nation to forge. Unfortunately, Joshua had very little from which to draw hope. His experiences told him not even the great Moses succeeded in delivering the Israelites into their new land. As for his own track record, there wasn’t much to talk about, except that he was Moses’ assistant and he saw the promised land once.

But it was to this novice leader that God promised His companionship. When Joshua’s eyes were glazed over with sorrow and fear, the Almighty God said to him: “Strength!” “Courage!” “Confidence!” “Hope!” “For the Lord your God will go wherever you go!”

More reliable than our most reliable forebears, experiences, and technological advancements, is God’s companionship. Surely, He can accompany us into our deepest brokenness and breathe new life into our Christian testimony in this ever-so-fragmented, post-Christian, post-pandemic world.

Even today, on the brink of 2023, our common Lord promises us His sweet and steady companionship. What honor! And what delight! I pray that the joy of His companionship will propel us daily into our new “promised lands” of healing, sustenance, insight, and great rejoicing in the days to come.

Ahna Cho, MDiv

Alumna; Associate Director of Korean Studies Program; Instructional Designer



Do Not Be Afraid

“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Deuteronomy 31:8

“Do not be afraid.” On the threshold of Israel’s entrance into the promised land, we encounter a reassuring exhortation that becomes integral to the narrative of our Lord’s nativity. “Do not be afraid.” These are words of comfort and reassurance. However, in order for these words to prove genuinely reassuring, it is imperative to properly understand the basis for them.

The context of this verse is God’s preparation of both Joshua and the people of Israel to enter the promised land under Joshua’s leadership. These people knew that this would be a land “flowing with milk and honey” (e.g., Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3). But they also knew that gaining entrance to the land would not be a walk in the park. Hardships, suffering, and trials lay ahead. Entering the land would be realized only through combat. Understandably then, they are in need of words—followed by action—of encouragement and admonition.

But why shouldn’t the people be afraid? Why shouldn’t they retreat from a path that would take them into conflict and suffering? They need not be afraid because the LORD Himself was already with them and because the LORD Himself would continue to be with them, no matter what.



“God is present, and lovingly and powerfully at work in the world.”

Over a millennium later, the same words are proclaimed to people who were, once again, understandably fearful. Taken aback at the appearance of an angel, a priest named Zechariah, who had been praying that he and his wife Elizabeth would have a child, is reassured by the angel who says, “Do not be afraid . . . for your prayer has been heard” (Luke 1:13). Upon learning that his betrothed was pregnant, Joseph, a “righteous man,” encountered an angel who said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20). As for Mary herself, she too was the recipient of an angel’s reassuring words, “Do not be afraid . . . for you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). Shepherds, who found themselves terrified by the appearance of an angel and overwhelmed by “the glory of the Lord,” were reassured with the exhortation, “Do not be afraid . . . I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11).

In each instance, and in a manner reminiscent of Moses’ words, the message of comfort and reassurance in the midst of a fearful encounter or circumstance was the same: God is present, and lovingly and powerfully at work in the world. He is Immanuel, God With Us (Matthew 1:23).

David Buschart, PhD
Professor of Theology and Historical Studies



Spacious Places

“When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord; he brought me into a spacious place.”

Psalm 118:5

I remember lying flat on my back under a pew in a small, dimly lit prayer chapel. Anxiety pulsed through my veins; my soul was bubbling over from the immense pressure of a lifetime of suppressed anger, spiritual trauma, and deep moralism. Hard-pressed, for sure. Then, in a moment of full-body vulnerability, I cried out to the Lord one simple word, “Okay!” From the tips of my toes up through my legs, my torso, my arms, my throat, and out my mouth: “Okay!” I’d tried a million different ways to find breathing space—anything to comfort the turmoil within. But really, it just took one word, “Okay!” Hinged on that word was the surrender of a lifetime. “Okay,” was acquiescence to the will and the love of the Father.

I thought things were going to get worse. I was terrified of what would happen if I actually let God in—fully in. If I cried out to Him in honest, fervent surrender, what would He do? But there, flat on my back, at the edges of my capacity, I had no other choice. Despite the terror, the apprehension, the primal fear, I said, “Okay.”

I can’t fully explain what happened next. Is it possible for your lung capacity to triple in size? Is it possible for your chest cavity to expand exponentially all at once? Is it possible for your wingspan to stretch a foot or two wider in an instant?

Quite literally, I felt the freedom and safety of a “spacious place.” The vast openness, the fresh air, the warm sun—every ion buzzing with the comfort of the Lord.

Sometimes comfort looks like a long bear hug. Like being held onto so tightly that the tension torturing your body melts away in the embrace. But sometimes comfort looks like wide open spaces. When strangling constraint is all you’ve ever known, to be allowed to take up the space you need is a profoundly deep comfort. Sometimes a full, deep breath is a gift from God. Sometimes divine comfort is simply space to be.

In this season, may we experience the reality of God’s comforting love for us through spacious places. And in practice of sacred hospitality, may we offer uncluttered space to others, so they might experience the deep richness of room to breathe.

Dustin Lindsey

Associate Director of Student Engagement

Delight in the Word of God

*“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight,
for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.”*

Jeremiah 15:16

Every year, on the feast called Simchat Torah (“the joy of the Torah”), Jews come together, raise Torah scrolls before the Lord, and dance with delight. In Jerusalem, people from Jewish communities around the world gather at the Western Wall with their Torah scrolls. They sing, dance, and celebrate together, honoring God for His eternal gift of the Word of God. The celebration is often compared to a wedding feast where people honor the bride and groom with great joy. Every time I witness Jews dancing with Torah scrolls, my heart is full of love for God and His Word.

During his ministry, Jeremiah witnessed the complete destruction of Solomon’s temple and the city of Jerusalem. His heart was no doubt crushed by these events, yet he found joy in the Word of God. He said, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight.” The Word was Jeremiah’s pleasure in times of sadness, his hope in times of difficulty, and his strength in weakness. He figuratively consumed the Word of God and allowed it to bring transforming joy to his heart.

A famous rabbi, the Gaon of Vilna, once said that the command to rejoice is the most difficult command to obey because life presents ample opportunities to pilfer our joy. Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and Nobel prize winner, learned the true meaning of the Gaon’s comment during the second World War while in a concentration camp. In camps throughout Europe, Jews managed to rejoice together on the feast of Simchat Torah while carrying stones on their back, instead of a Torah in their hands, and while performing hard labor under the watchful eye of Nazis. Even in extremely painful circumstances, Jews found joy in the Word of God, and with no Torah scrolls to hold and cherish, they still celebrated God and His Word.

Two thousand years ago, the living Word of God—Jesus—was made flesh and dwelt among us. He came to bring us joy, love, and hope. In times of distress, we find delight in Him. In times of difficulty, His strength wells up in us. In times of sadness, He infuses us with joy unspeakable and full of glory. If Jews who have not yet met their Messiah can dance, sing, and take delight in the Word of God, how much more so can we who have met the Living Word—Jesus—go through life with abundant joy in our hearts?

Hélène Dallaire, PhD

Earl S. Kalland Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages

Walk in Comfort with the Light!

“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”

Psalm 27:1

How many times have you approached your home in the dark? All around it was darkness, but once you got in and turned on the lights, you felt an overwhelming sense of comfort and safety. The season of Advent, which signifies the coming of Christ into the world, brings to the forefront the comfort we receive when we have the light of Christ in our lives. He is not an artificial or contrived light, but genuine light. He alone brings brightness and erases the darkness. His presence inspires calm and dispels fear. How grateful we are that His light will shine throughout any dark situations or circumstances that will come about in our lives!

The psalmist David knew all too well about walking in darkness, but he also knew about walking in the light. Just like us, his life was a picture of both. Walking in darkness is uncomfortable and can be scary. But as we walk in the light of our Savior, we can move with great confidence and assurance that we will not walk alone.

David begs the question—whom shall I fear and of whom shall I be afraid? Our answer is that we do not need to fear the shadows of our past, the circumstances of our present, or the mysteries of our future. Our Light has come. God sent His Son as the eternal, worldwide light who illuminated our dark souls and has provided us with a perfectly lit path to salvation. We have no need to fear! We will feel His strength over our lives no matter where we find ourselves on this journey.

Let us be sure to take time in this Advent season to pause and do as the songwriter admonishes us to do as we are comforted by the light. We will “walk in the light, beautiful light, somewhere the dew drops of mercy shine bright. Shine all around us by day and by night, Jesus, the light of the world.”*

*Iantha Brown, MDiv
Alumna; Urban Initiatives Community Liaison*

*Vincent Keith Brown, Sr., PhD
Student, Doctor of Ministry*

*“Jesus, the Light of the World,” Mrs. James Vincent Coombs, 1898

Comfort through Unity

“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”

Philippians 2:1–2

Paul assumes that there are definite, encouraging benefits to being a Christ follower. Grammatically, he is using the class of Greek condition that asserts the “ifs” as true for the sake of argument. Given his personal history, however, there is absolutely no argument. Paul knows there is comfort from Christ’s love and believes that the Philippians, despite their own struggles, do too. Thus, he follows his four ifs with an imperative; he exhorts his readers to make his joy complete.

It is not the fulfillment of Paul’s personal joy that is chiefly in view, though. Rather, it is the means of fulfillment. Paul’s joy will be fulfilled by unity: unity of mind and spirit, unity of love. I think Paul’s vision of unity left room for diverse opinions and personalities. Christian unity does not mean that we all need to look and act in a certain way. Paul tells his readers to “think the same thing” (like-minded) by “thinking the one thing” (of one mind), to preclude selfishness and ensure that it is Jesus who unites believers. If we read a bit farther, we find that the fountainhead of Christian unity is the humility of Christ; in particular, the humility that led Him to the incarnation and ultimately to the cross.

Recently, the world has confronted a common enemy, but it seems that disunity is the result. Perhaps that is all we can expect from the world. But we who follow the lead of Christ should be different. We live in uncertain times, yes; so did the Philippians. The remedy now, as it was then, is to focus on Christ and building His kingdom. If we have a common love, if we think the tender and compassionate thoughts that caused the Son of God to take on the role of a servant, we begin to approach unity.

As an Advent prayer, even as a Christmas gift from our heavenly Father, let us ask to think the thoughts of Jesus. The last few years might have left us isolated and self-centered, so let us respond with humility and serve others. Uncertain times are the perfect times for the Church to shine brightly. Let us be the light of the world that the Bible tells us we are. In this Christmas season, we can be both comforted and joyous because very little about our task as Christians is about us.

*Elodie Emig, MA
Instructor of Greek*

The Mighty Warrior Who Saves

*“The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.”*

Zephaniah 3:17

Mighty Warrior
Sing o'er me with delight
Fill me with joy

As a teen, I attended a summer music program and had the privilege of interacting with professional artists whose deep relationships with Christ shaped their craft. One year, a dynamic opera singer with a booming voice admonished me to read today's Bible passage and “enjoy it!”

Our God has many attributes, but what rises in your heart when you consider that the Mighty Warrior delights in you so fully that He breaks out in song? My heart protests a bit and begins to fabricate a list of all the reasons why I'm not delightful. I think of a humanity that is individually and collectively capable of generating a mess—one out of which it is nearly impossible to find a way. We disconnect ourselves from Him and wonder why things are so out of order.

But the first phrase of this verse reminds me that He is already with us. He sees the good, the bad, the ugly, and everything else we could possibly conjure up. And yet, He seeks us fearlessly, longing to be reconnected to us. My Mighty Warrior knows that His image is imprinted in me, and He knows what I can be. He draws me to Himself and transforms my heart with peace. He set my feet on a rock and put a new song in my mouth (Psalm 40:2–3). This is where the joy comes. The Mighty Warrior who delights in us re-establishes the connection between humanity and Himself and invites us into the intimacy of a relationship with Him.

Through the wintry days of Advent, may we embrace that Immanuel, the Mighty Warrior, came to be with us. And no matter how much we feel the bruises of our humanity, may we know beyond doubt that He is God With Us and takes utmost delight in us.

*Lauren Holland
Student, Master of Arts (Clinical Mental Health Counseling)*

Closeness with God

*“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”*

Psalm 23:4

All of us have experienced varying levels of disruption, disappointment, and grief these past few years. My husband and I both came down with Covid-19 and missed our son’s wedding in June. Our devastating loss of this long-awaited milestone likely joins your own losses of missed graduations and births, changes in employment or travel plans, lost opportunities or relationships, or even loss of life. Life, for many of us, is not going how we planned.

Psalm 23 was penned by David, a young shepherd boy who would one day become king. This psalm is one many of us commit to memory from an early age. What I find comforting is reading how David switched his description of God from He to You. He makes me lie down, He leads, He restores, He guides . . . for You are with me. Your rod, Your staff. The “He” becomes “You” in the valley of the shadow of death. Intimacy with God occurs in the darkest valley.

Suffering and disappointment, those darkest valleys, can take us to places of intimacy with God that a life of ease cannot. This closeness and firsthand knowing cannot be manufactured or taken away. Embracing disruptions and loss while remaining tenderhearted toward God is one of the greatest challenges we face as followers of Jesus.

I have met people who are stuck and unable to grow because they cannot make peace with how their lives have unfolded. They shake their fists at God and don’t move past protesting and questioning why. While God welcomes our raw and honest emotions, when the difficulties become the primary focus, our hearts become hardened and bitterness takes root.

I have also met Christians who have lived surrendered to God through hardships, and I’ve seen character, depth, and beauty formed in and through their lives. There are no shortcuts to character formation, but the outcome is breathtaking. Not only do they experience comfort and joy; they spread this gift to others.

God’s ways may not make sense to us, but our trust is never misplaced when we yield our hearts and lives to Him. As we follow the Good Shepherd where He leads, we trust that God has more for us and for those we love than we can see. God’s comfort and joy, and the promise of His presence, are always with us. Immanuel—God With Us.

Vivian Mabuni
Member, Board of Trustees



Making Days Count

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

2 Corinthians 1:3–4

We sat across the lunch table from long-time friends, Luke and Patti.* Their positive attitude and sense of fun made our times together enjoyable. We started with our usual banter; but during a pause, Luke became serious. He said he had something to tell us. We were shocked as he revealed that he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and had only a few months to live. Patti's eyes welled with tears, as did ours.

What he said next was even more of a surprise. He did not lament, “Why me?” or express bitterness towards God, nor did he ask us to pray diligently for his healing—though we assured him we would. He said, “I have been given a gift. Most people don't know how much time they have and procrastinate. I have a deadline. I am determined to use the time I have left for God's glory.” He went on to tell us about people he knew who needed Jesus, letters he needed to write, and apologies he wanted to deliver. He was mostly concerned about his family. They were hard to approach. He could also use his time to encourage other sufferers he met during his treatments, making them laugh and showing them hope in Jesus. His waning life would be a beacon of Jesus' love. This prospect delighted him.

I was reminded of Moses' Psalm 90 where he asks God to teach us to number our days so we have a heart of wisdom. Luke had indeed learned this. How wise he was not to bemoan his situation but make each day count. He would apply 2 Corinthians 1:4: “[God] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” In addition, Luke planned to approach each day with expectation of what God would do through him. In spite of his cancer, he would say, “This is the day that the Lord has made; let [me] rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24, ESV). We left convicted. How casual we are with our time. May God give us this same joy in each new day so that we see opportunities to use it for His kingdom.

*Sue Roberts
Student, Doctor of Ministry*

*Names have been changed to protect privacy.

The Promise of a Return to Eden

“The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.”

Isaiah 51:3

The LORD speaks with love through the great prophet Isaiah. He uses the same word translated both as “comfort” and “compassion” in the opening lines and so recalls the command to “Comfort, Comfort my people” that began this great section in Isaiah 40:1. Long before, Lamech had prophesied how Noah would bring comfort to the world (Genesis 5:29), an easing of the hard work required because the LORD had cursed the ground because of sin (Genesis 3:17–19). Eden—the garden of the LORD, where the man and woman could easily find all they needed, both the food for their bodies and the direct and personal communion with the LORD to give life to their spirits—was lost due to sin.

But now, God promises a return to Eden: the tree of life, the life-giving waters of the new Jerusalem, and, most of all, the personal and eternal presence of God and of the Lamb Jesus Christ (Revelation 22:1–5). This is the great promise of Immanuel, meaning “God With Us.” Noah did not bring this comfort in the prophecy passed forward generation after generation. It came at last in the form of the baby, Jesus the Christ, the Immanuel prophesied by Isaiah (7:14) and fulfilled in the birth, that gives meaning to Christmas (Matthew 1:23) and purpose to our lives as we trust and follow Him.

Long ago, in the village of Bethlehem, the Virgin Mary gave birth to a baby who would die for the sins of the world and reverse the ancient curse. We remain in a world of sin, suffering, and death, but we journey to Zion and the gladness and thanksgiving that Christmas points us toward. Let us be changed by the Spirit, the Comforter, who brought this good news! Let us live the good news! Let us announce the good news to a world bewildered and lost! May “the sound of singing” enter our hearts as we enjoy the beautiful carols and through them proclaim that the Comforter has come!

Richard S. Hess, PhD

Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages

Joy from Trust

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13

Hope—looking forward with confident expectation to the coming of the God of hope—that is what the Christmas season is all about. It is about remembering the incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who came that we might be reconciled to God, thereby bringing about abundant life. Abundant life includes joy and peace that come through faith in Him.

Here is a question to reflect on today: Are you currently experiencing joy and peace?

In our world, there are many things that bring about sickness, sorrow, and distress. It is impossible to watch or listen to the news without recognizing that we are experiencing life in a broken world. War and scandal and disease and violence and natural disasters enter our homes by way of news reports about our communities, nation, and the world. You may be experiencing the overwhelming stress of living day-to-day in a culture and society driven by hyperstimulation from media and information overload, more work expected of you than can ever be completed, and nonstop movement from your rising in the morning to lying down to sleep at night. Yet, through it all, Paul reminds us we have access to joy and peace and an abundance of hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is possible to experience joy and peace, even in the midst of chaos, by placing our complete trust in the One who is the source of all hope, Jesus Christ. During this Advent season, we not only remember the humility and incarnation of God, when Jesus came to earth as a baby in Bethlehem, but we also look forward to the day when He will return with all power, authority, and majesty. “For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Take a moment today to breathe and remember to focus on Jesus, remembering where our joy and our peace comes from. In Jesus, we live and move and have our being. In Him, we experience the fullness of joy and peace.

Debora Barr, MDiv
Alumna; Washington DC Extension Campus Site Director

December 24

Reminders of Joy

“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.”

Psalm 94:19

Though we will sing of heavenly peace and silent nights, the weeks leading up to Christmas often are better characterized as frenetic and noisy. Even as we embrace deep nostalgia and well-worn traditions, the very same can also pierce deeply with reminders of loss, loneliness, or unfulfilled longings. During the season in which we most want to experience joy, anxiety oversteps the bounds to take its place.

Yet God has decorated the Christmas season with small gifts, little pockets of joy that greet us at times unexpectedly, though still with intimate familiarity. The warm, inviting taste of cardamom and the sharp, refreshing scent of pine boughs. Glad tidings ringing forth in the jingle of bells. The dazzling vision of a child's gleeful smile, and the soft caress of snowflakes falling on upturned cheeks. These are but a few of the small marvels that have brought me a moment of pause during the high-strung hustle and bustle. They carve out a divine reprieve wherein joy breaks through anxiety, and I remember again God's goodness and love.

If anyone knew about navigating anxiety, it was the psalmists, whose poetic words captured their angst with stark honesty. Psalm 94 itself churns with crushing torment. Oppression plagues the people as the wicked work insidious evil in the world. Those who wish to bring harm act with impunity, mocking even God with taunts to suggest He may have turned a blind eye to His people.

Then, cleaving the tension, comes the relieving reminder—those who serve the Lord are uplifted by His unfailing love. He will neither forget His people nor leave them to wither forever in distress. In God's consolation, we will find joy, even when surrounded by agitation and trouble. There is no difficulty in this world beyond the reach of the comfort He provides His people.

The little holiday moments that cause us to pause in wonder provide an opportunity to return attention to God, whose faithful provision did not consist of merely casting forth His consolation from afar. Instead, God sent His Son, Immanuel, God With Us. At Christmas, we celebrate God, who draws near and brings His comfort and joy to us as a present, tangible reality. In Christ, our joy is made complete, and we find at last the peace for which our hearts long.

Brandy M. Eldridge
Student, Master of Arts (Christian Studies)

December 25

“But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.’”

Luke 2:10

Comfort and Joy. Like all highly sought-after and rare commodities, they come at a high price. Many try to buy them. Just stop for a moment and think about how much we spend trying to purchase comfort and joy. I think if we're honest with ourselves, we plow through no small part of our budget ringing up expenditures in the comfort and joy categories. How's that working for us?

Lasting comfort and life-giving joy can be bought. But not by us. They are too expensive for even the wealthiest people. The cost is just too high and the payment we bring totally inadequate. Comfort and joy in their purest, most lasting expressions can only be bought by the One who defeated that which makes our quest for them little more than running after the wind—sin, death, and evil. His name is Jesus, the One whose coming an angel announced as “good news that will cause great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10).

The apostle John experienced firsthand the comfort and joy made possible only by our Savior: Caught up in a vision that takes him into the very throne room of heaven, he sees the One True God surrounded by heavenly beings crying out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8). And in the hand of the One seated on the throne is a scroll that must be unrolled to complete God's plan for all of human history, the fulfillment of all that he has promised to do, namely, the final defeat of sin, death, and evil in the making new of all things (Revelation 5:1).

But no one can be found in heaven who is worthy to break the seals on the scroll and bring God's plan to completion, and John weeps inconsolably. All that he hopes for is lost. God's plan of redemption will not be accomplished. Sin, death, and evil will have the final word. There is no comfort; there is no joy (Revelation 5:2–4).

But then, John hears that there is One who has conquered sin, death, and evil. He is worthy to open the scroll. John sees a slaughtered lamb standing in the heavenly throne room. This lamb takes the scroll and the throne room is filled with the praise of all who are present,

And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

(Revelation 5:9–10)

It's hard to imagine that John didn't join in that chorus of joyous praise. In that heavenly throne room, he experiences both lasting comfort and life-giving joy because Jesus has paid the price for our deliverance. That's why the birth of Jesus is “good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” Let's celebrate that great truth today and every day.

*Mark Young, PhD
President, Denver Seminary*



May you experience the gifts of
comfort and joy
found in the birth of our Savior throughout
Christmas and in the New Year.

Mark + Priscilla Gray
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6399 South Santa Fe Drive
Littleton, Colorado 80120
800.922.3040 or 303.761.2482