

# Joy To The Joyless

Advent Devotional by Steve Wetzel

Sunday, December 15, 2019

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## **Scripture Meditation**

*Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! For the Lord will remove his hand of judgment and will disperse the armies of your enemy. And the Lord himself, the King of Israel, will live among you! At last your troubles will be over, and you will never again fear disaster. On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be, "Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid! For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." "I will gather those who mourn for the appointed festivals; you will be disgraced no more." Zephaniah 3:14-18*

## **Scream Off**

One of the funnier games I've seen played with Jr. High students is what is known as a scream off. All of the students line up at the end of a large grassy field and on the count of three, run to the other side all the while screaming as loud as they can in one uninterrupted breath. It's very common to see students collapsing in fits of laughter in the middle of the field because the "game" is just not something you normally do. Think about it: When was the last time you were encouraged to shout in public for no other reason than it was just fun. For the pure joy, of shouting?

The holiday season often seems a place where we encourage quiet, meditative spaces, not loud, boisterous fits of noise. There are times when we feel like the "noise" of the season is the enemy but the prophet Zephaniah was calling the people to sing, to shout and to rejoice at the top of their lungs because God brings joy.

The truth is, sometimes joy can be hard to come by. The opposite of joy is fear. Zephaniah was prophesying that the people of Israel can look forward to a time where there will be no judgement, no enemies, and no fear. The trouble is the longer we wait - the further out those expectations are placed - the more chances there are for fear to creep in, stealing away our joy. What if our expectations aren't met? What if we miss out on celebrations? What if life turns out to be something I didn't expect or want?

- Have you ever been afraid? What helped you stop being afraid?
- As a family, how can you help each other not be afraid this holiday?

### **Rejoice Anyway**

In the days of Jesus' birth, King Herod was driven by fear. The news of a new king born did not fill him with joy, but with fear and doubt of what was to come. Would the people revolt? Would his kingdom be overthrown in favor of this new king? In contrast, every time the angels brought news of the birth of Jesus they said not to fear, but instead rejoice! Be filled with joy! As Mary internalized the news of her impending birth, she did as the angels said and turned to joy. She turned to singing and rejoiced despite not knowing what the future held.

- Have you ever found it hard to be joyful? Why?
- Look up Philippians 4:4-7. Read it together as a family.

Paul states in Philippians that we should rejoice in all circumstances. Good and bad. Don't be anxious. Don't fear. Rejoice! Bring everything to God in prayer and then be filled with joy because God promises us peace.

As a family, take a few moments and go outside. Take turns shouting "Hosanna" or "Praise God" or even "Merry Christmas" as loud as you can. Ignore the weird looks you might get from your neighbors and enjoy the moment of abandon celebrating the season with loud shouts of Joy.