



A LOT OF

'MAY THE "STRENGTH OF JOY" IN CHRIST BE YOURS IN ABUNDANCE'.

A lot of joy is highlighted in the events related to Jesus' birth! An angel told Zechariah that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son named John who would prepare the way for the Messiah. "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth..." (Luke 1:14 NRSV).

A heavenly messenger told Mary she would birth a son named Jesus, whose kingdom would be without end (Luke 1:26–38). Later, Mary visited her cousin, Elizabeth, and the baby in Elizabeth's womb "leaped for joy" (Luke 1:44 NRSV).

Mary's ensuing hymn of joy was so eloquent it still resonates in the chambers of our hearts and churches today. It included the affirmation that, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46 NRSV).

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem shepherds tending their sheep nearby saw the sky filled with the glory of God. A heavenly messenger exclaimed: "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10 NRSV).

A cursory reading of these verses may lead to the conclusion that joy depends on surprising, exciting, or cheerful events. However, further reflection leads to a broader understanding.

Throughout scripture, joy and the Holy Spirit are linked closely in all manner of circumstances. Joy is a spiritual gift and the quality of life as a disciple of Jesus. It is rooted in ongoing relationship to God and faith in God's purposes. Spiritually grounded joy persists even as we encounter disappointment, loss, and suffering.

From this perspective, I can identify different streams of joy coursing in my life through difficult—as well as good—times. The joy of steadfast love received and given—no matter what—stands out. There also is the joy of responding daily to the call of discipleship and ministry regardless of challenges. Regular worship with my church community and personal spiritual practices usher me into a depth of joy not contingent on good fortune.

Additionally, there is the joy of generosity. We are created to reflect and grow in the image of God by being generous and compassionate givers. Joy increases when our generosity empowers the fulfillment of God's purposes. Joy deepens when we practice whole-life stewardship and enlarge our capacity to support Christ's initiatives to bring reconciliation and peace to creation. All this joy points to and results in eternal joy. "Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in the grace of generosity that flows from compassionate hearts..." (Doctrine and Covenants 163:9).

Joy also rises from life in Christ-inspired community. Stanley Hauerwas, in *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, states:

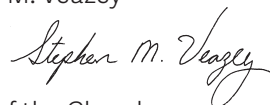
...the joy we receive as Christians is not that of a passing occasion. Rather it is a joy that derives from finding our home among a people who carry the words and skills of God's kingdom of peace.

Jesus invites his disciples to abide in his love so that, "my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11 NRSV). Jesus' joy is the continual joy of faithful embodiment of God's love and spirit. "...Jesus...who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross..." (Hebrews 12:2 NRSV).

This deeper joy resides in the lives of devoted disciples. Surrounded by unrelenting poverty and disease, Mother Teresa testified, "Joy is strength." Nehemiah 8:10 NRSV agrees: "...the joy of the Lord is your strength."

As you again journey to Bethlehem during Advent, may the "strength of joy" in Christ be yours in abundance.

—Stephen M. Veazey



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