
Ignite

"Lord, we thank You for the gift of Your Son. Today we want to receive the unspeakable joy that can only be found in You. Help us to turn our eyes and focus on Your plans and not ours. May we encounter You personally as You shape our hearts and minds back to You. Amen."



SERMON SUMMARY

Note to Word Facilitator: The sermon notes below is a summary of the sermon. You may choose to further summarize it according to the needs and context of your CG members. The goal is not just to go through it “verbatim” but to prepare well, allowing members to recall and engage the message in the best possible way.

Advent: A New Beginning - Joy

Pr. Gilbert Tan

Luke 2:8-9 (NLT)

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. Luke 2:8-9 (NLT)

Matthew 2:1 (NIVUK)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem...

Matthew 2:10 (NLT)

When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!

Luke 1:46-48 (NLT)

'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant... from now on all generations will call me blessed...

Introduction

Everyone, old and young alike, have been affected in one way or another by the Covid-19 pandemic this year. This pandemic has brought about so many challenges and uncertainties in life that joy would be far from our minds. We have had to make some adjustments and changes in the way we live our lives. For some, these adjustments have brought about positive changes, and for others, negative ones.

A fruit of the spirit that should be evident in our lives is Joy. The word “Joy” and themes of joy is found throughout the Bible. In fact, Paul commands us to be joyful. He not only said “Be joyful” but “Always be joyful” in 1 Thessalonians 5:16. In the midst

of all that has happened this year, how have we as followers of Jesus exhibited joy to those around us? If Paul were to say to us to “Be joyful”, it would be easy to do because we can then choose when we can be joyful. However, with the word “Always”, it means that we do not choose when we should be joyful. Instead, joy should be our disposition in all circumstances and seasons of life.

BIG IDEA: Always Be Joyful



1 Joy is Here *Luke 2:8-9 (NLT), Luke 2:10-12, John 15:11 (NIVUK), Romans 15:13 (NIV)*

The shepherds were going about their daily affairs and concerns of life when the Angel of the Lord appeared before them. They never expected the glory and presence of God to be manifested before them as they went about their day, probably discussing and planning for the days ahead. They assumed that this evening would be the same as every other evening. However, it was the evening that would change their lives, as they encountered God and glorious joy.

We try to plan our days ahead, making adjustments along the way to keep to a routine. We might have been oblivious to the fact that God is with us and always will be. Jesus Christ who is Immanuel – God with Us, came to dwell with us. As believers of Jesus, He is with us now. His presence is with us and our joy is complete because His joy is in our lives as we constantly abide in Him. Christ is our source of Joy.

We have joy because of our trust and hope in our Lord. Joy should be one of the

hallmarks of our faith in Jesus. This joy is a permanent one, one that is not based on circumstances or influenced by our feelings or emotions. However, there is still a gap between our faith and how we live our lives. Am I the same person when things are going right and when things are going wrong? Does my relationship with Jesus Christ change when things don't go my way? Is Jesus still the Lord of my life in the midst of difficult and challenging times?

There is a difference between joy and happiness. Happiness is based on events and things that happen in your life. It is circumstantial and temporal. It comes and goes. Happiness is a feel good moment. It focuses on me, myself and I. Joy on the other hand, is not based on events. It is the emotion of hope. A person without hope is a person without joy. This hope that we all know is not based on desires, dreams or wants but on the person of Jesus Christ. We all desire and hope that this pandemic will come to an end. We all hope that things will go back to normal like the days of pre-MCO. We should not cling to this hope or desire as there is no guarantee of them happening. Our Hope is only in God. With this hope you can be unhappy, experiencing storms and yet still have joy.

2. Joy is a Journey *Matthew 2:1 (NIVUK), Matthew 2:10 (NLT), John 16:20 (NIV), Psalm 30:5b*

The Magi travelled a great distance to see Jesus, coming from as far as the Far East. Their travels would have been slow. They were exposed to different challenges in their journey. When they finally saw the Star and found Jesus, they were filled with joy. There was such joy in them as they encountered Jesus.

Joy is a journey and a process of life. Just like the Magi who travelled a long distance and experienced hardships along the way, there will be seasons in the journey of life where we have to go through hardships and challenges. At times the hardships on this journey feels like it is more than we can bear and we are beaten and broken on the inside. In the midst of our pain and turmoil this is what Jesus says to us, "You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." John 16:20 (NIV).

Joy comes through the journey of brokenness and pain. You often cry and grieve your way to a place of Joy. God loves the broken hearted. It is in our most vulnerable state where joy begins to be revealed. When we allow the Holy Spirit to move, the Joy of the Lord becomes our strength. We need to recognise that God is with us in our grief and our pain. We are not alone in our moments of isolation and desperation. He is with us even when all things are going well.

Joy is a process. People that try to find instant joy or to attain joy as fast as possible always end up doing the wrong thing. They look for a quick fix, the adrenaline rush, the latest thrill or drug or a new relationship to experience some essence of joy for

themselves. The sad thing is that the result of all these quick fixes causes them to be worse off than before. Instead of having a better outlook of life, they become more depressed. Instead of finding clarity they are faced with greater confusion. Instead of finding freedom, they find themselves more entangled in sin.

God uses these dark and difficult moments to shape and mould our lives and character. He reveals to us the desires of His heart during these seasons. These are precious times of intimacy with God. In these intimate times with Jesus, his life-giving joy flows through us. Therefore, do not take shortcuts in this journey of joy. It is a process of discovering Joy. We come alive in this journey because God is with us throughout. And in this journey it is His Joy that sustains us. For every journey there is always the first step and in this journey of joy, the first step is to recognise that God is with you. He is with you from the very beginning of the journey.

3. Joy is a Difficult Choice *Luke 1:34 (NLT), Luke 1:38, Luke 1:46-48 (NLT)*

Mary's life as a teenage girl was turned upside down when the angel Gabriel appeared to tell her that she, an engaged virgin, was pregnant with the Son of God. Who would believe her story? She risked being humiliated if people were to find out. She would have brought shame to her family and herself. What would she say to Joseph? How could she explain her way out of this situation?

Mary did not ask "Why me?" Her first and only response to the angel of God was "How?". Many of the great men of God in the Old Testament responded to God first with "Why me? And a reason why it should not be them. Mary's reply is "How will this be?" She did not ask for God to clear the mess that she was about to face. She did not put herself first before God's plan. She inquired of God and His ways. Mary had a difficult choice to make. She could have chosen to react in anger and blame God for her in this situation. She could have reasoned with God to help resolve some of her potential public relation challenges she had to face with her family and her village. However we do not see Mary questioning God at all.

The beautiful result of this difficult choice of trusting God and acknowledging His ways are higher than her ways is that she was filled with such great joy. Mary had joyful contentment in God when she answered "How will this be" instead of "Why me".

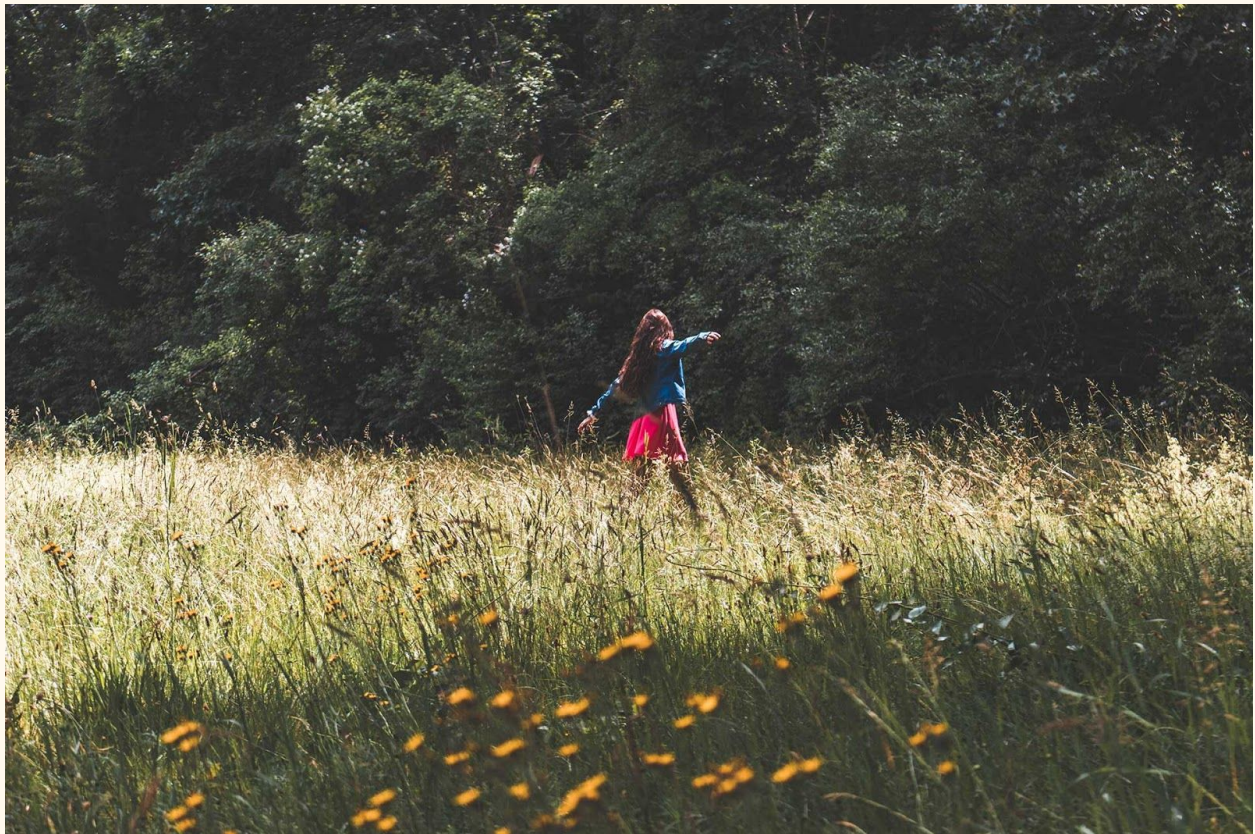
Conclusion

Many of us have committed the challenges and problems of life that we are facing to God in prayer. Some of us may have prayed for God to intervene and bring respite to our situation. God listens to all our prayers and wants to answer them. We can learn to pray "How will this situation/issue grow me to be more Christ-like?" or "How can I be used by You through this situation?" Praying in such a manner shifts our

perspective from “my perspective” to “God’s perspective”. From God’s perspective there is great Hope and Joy even in the midst of our difficult circumstances.

SERMON REFLECTION

Many years ago, one night after a word sharing session at a Christian camp, we were told to pair off into groups of two to pray for one another. My friend who paired with me described a vision that she saw about me. In the first scene, she saw me standing together with a crowd of people, all of us clothed in black. In the second scene she saw a cross of crucifixion. In the third, she saw me running freely in a field of flowers into the sun.



After hearing my friend describe what she saw, I understood what the vision was about. The first scene where we were dressed in black, depicted sadness, depression and hopelessness. It represented sorrow, the absence of joy. The second scene was about Jesus, about the power at work through His death on the cross, to redeem us and free us from hopelessness. The third scene was a result of this power and

redemption. Me running freely in a field of flowers was a picture of joy, of bliss and delight.

The vision spoke to my heart because during that time, I felt a sense of hopelessness and sadness. Life felt mundane and meaningless, with a lack of purpose and motivation. I attempted to fill my spare time with things/hobbies/activities that would help take my mind off these negative feelings, but the sense of heaviness did not go away.

The vision my friend shared with me was a great encouragement because it seemed like God was saying to me, "I know what you are going through and how you feel. I want to help you and set you free. I want to give you joy, so that you can live life to the fullest."

Transformation from a state of depression and hopelessness did not happen immediately after my friend shared the vision with me and prayed for me. It was a process. It was a journey of joy. It was a process of shifting my perspective to God's perspective. As I read His Word and grew in my walk with God, I learned to trust that in Christ, I have purpose and meaning. I find my fulfillment and joy in Him. He has created me for a divine purpose and calling, and I have hope in Him. The result was joy, one that is fulfilling and freeing, complete and abundant. The joy was evident and you can tell when it reflects off the faces of those around you. There is truth in that you receive more joy when you give joy to others. It multiplies and it overflows.

Fast forward to now, the journey of joy has not always been an easy one. It has ups and downs, peaks and valleys. I need to constantly remind myself that joy is not based on circumstances but on the everlasting truth of God, and to choose joy as a response to situations in life, even when the choice is difficult, when things do not go the way I hoped they would. I learned that it is ok to be sad, because it is a human response to things around us that are not right. However, we are not to lose hope, because hope is where joy comes from, and this joy gives me the strength that I need to live each day.

Contributed by Anthea Tan



APPLICATION

Note to Word facilitator:

As you prepare for this session, this is a great time to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you to use the questions efficiently. You can select, modify or entirely create your own questions, according to the needs of your CG, especially if you feel that there are too many questions than required for the allocated time. The questions below are crafted with a certain flow in mind. You could use these towards the end or insert them in between your own sermon reflection and summary.

Suggested Icebreaker Questions / Activities

- What makes you happy? Show a picture of it on your phone or describe it. (Examples: A type of food, a place, a person or people, a personal belonging, a pet, an experience)

Suggested Word Introductory Questions

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the level of joy in your life right now? (1 = No joy and 10 = Great joy) Explain why your joy is at that level.

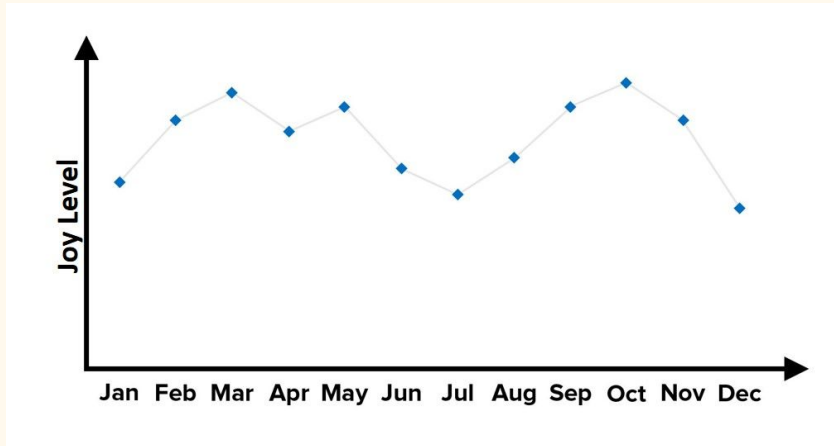
Suggested Questions linked to main point:

Joy is Here

- What does a good day look like to you? How would you describe it? And what does a bad day look like? In light of what Christ has done, by redeeming and saving us, how do you now view that day? Is your response different and how so?
- Do you get angry when things do not go your way? Why? In light of the hope we have in Christ, how do you respond?
- Happiness is about ourselves. Joy is about God. Explain.

Joy is a Journey

- How would you describe the journey of your life? Where is your destination?
- Draw a graph that explains your journey of joy this year on a monthly basis. There is an example of the graph below. You can do it on a piece of paper and share it with others.



- Joy comes through the journey of brokenness and pain. How can we move from a place of brokenness and pain to a place of joy?

Joy is a Difficult Choice

- Fill in the blanks: “_____” takes away the joy from my life. Take that word in the blank and give it to God. How does this help you find joyful contentment, knowing that God is in control and holds your situation in His hands?
- In the midst of the problems we face this year, how do we step away from the world view and shift instead to a biblical view? How do we shift from “my perspective” to “God’s perspective”?

Question Bank *(Extra questions you can use to bring discussion further as you see fit):*

1. Thinking about Luke 2:8-9 above, imagine the faces of the shepherds when, “suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared.” Describe the emotions on their faces as you imagine them. How would you now respond knowing that the presence of God is with you always?
2. The wise men had been following the star that guided them on their journey to the birthplace of Christ. Think about a difficult “journey” you have had – where you allowed God to lead in the face of great adversity. Talk about how God showed up in the journey and the joy you experienced at the end.

3. It is a difficult choice to really trust God and experience the fullest joy. Have this choice become easier for you as you learn to trust in God? What may be holding you back from trusting God?
 4. How are you embracing joy as a journey? Has joy become your instant fix to your problems only? Share an instance that you found that joy as an instant fix was short-lived.
-



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?



Photo by Annie Spratt from Unsplash

Story of the week...

In this season of Advent, we will be reflecting on the One who brought us Hope, Peace, Joy & ultimately, Love. A video podcast is released each week for four consecutive weeks leading to Christmas. This week's theme is JOY and being featured is Pr Phua Seng Tiong, recipient of National "Tokoh Guru" Award (2009). In this podcast, Pr Phua shares his life-long passion in education and the joy in his heart that kept him going despite being in a field that is often under-appreciated.

Watch the podcast [here!](#) Better still, share it with others that you think will be inspired by Pr Phua Seng Tiong's story!

Note: Videos will be posted on dumc.my/chats every Sunday at 12am (for the duration of Advent).

This 4-part [video podcast](#) is put together by Darren Ong and Team



"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

- Maya Angelou

If you or your CG member(s) has a story to share related to today's Word or any other story that speaks of His goodness or of IMPACTNow, **share their/your story** [\[HERE\]](#)



PRAYER

Note to CGL: You (or someone you assign this portion to), may lead by praying OR reading these prayers together as a CG during worship.

Pray for:

1. Revival of the Church

For the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of every Christian; not only be hearers of the Word, but doers also, deepening our relationships with Jesus Christ, and manifesting His love and compassion.

2. Christmas Events and Initiatives

May this season bring many people back and closer to God, especially the least and the lost. To bathe each planned event and activity with prayer and alignment with the Holy Spirit.

3. Nation – Transformation of the Nation

Persevere in prayer for government leaders to be steadfast on this long road of recovery to bring the nation back on the path of God's justice, righteousness and compassion, and for wisdom and strength to rebuild and restore its broken systems. (1 Timothy 2:2).




OTHER RESOURCES

Below are some links to resources for you. Do **CLICK** on the images below!

FEATURED

In view of our current changing landscape that affects us individually and corporately, here are some featured resources for you this month!




Waiting in the Dark: Why We Need Advent T...

1 hour

[youtube.com](#)

Prayer & Spirituality

Video Clip



Breathe: Being with God in Silence

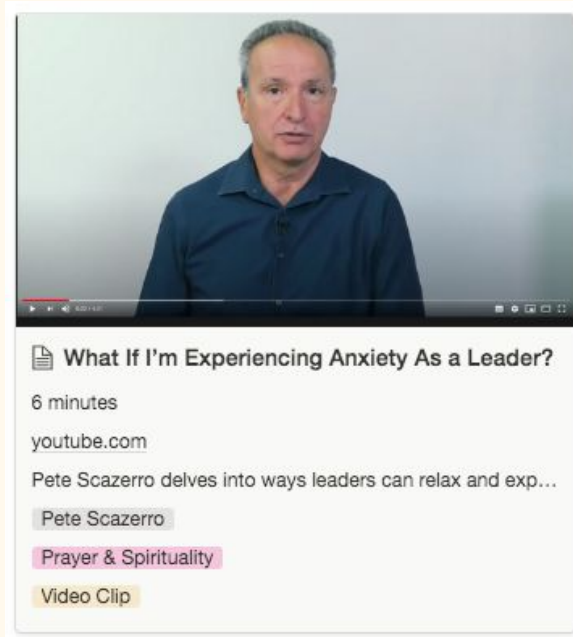
15 minutes

[youtube.com](#)

This 15 minute experience was created to provide a guide...

Prayer & Spirituality

Video Clip



OTHER RESOURCES

Discover a host of other resources curated for you here!



DUMC STORIES

*Be blessed by a compilation of inspiring DUMC Stories that
you can share with others!*

