

Declaring Joy!

For the joy of the Lord is your strength and your stronghold.

~ *Nehemiah 8:10 (AMP)*

Rejoice and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. ~ *Isaiah 12:6 (AMP)*

Woof, woof, bark, bark, yip, woof, bark ... The unbridled, gleeful barking can only mean one thing. Axel, our neighbor's big, black, furry "grand dog" is visiting and has found his way into the river. Being in the water brings Axel pure joy and seems to provide boundless energy that he cannot contain! He declares that message throughout the neighborhood every minute that he is in the water.

As I started to prepare for Christmas, I set up my Advent wreath. While looking at the candle for Joy, my mind somehow escaped to last summer and Axel declaring his joy. I felt convicted that I have a Savior who brings salvation, strength, healing, and joy, and yet I do not constantly and loudly proclaim that joy for all to hear.

Throughout the Christmas season, we hear the message of joy.

Scripture tells us that an angel brought the message to shepherds of "good news of great joy, which shall be for all the people" (Luke 2:10 AMP). We sing carols about spreading "tidings of comfort and joy." Should we be doing less on a daily basis? Should we not be proclaiming the joy of the Lord loudly and constantly?

As we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Christ child, let's also spread our joy so everyone hears the message that the joy of the Lord is our strength, our salvation, and our stronghold.

Heavenly Father, you are our joy and our strength. Please help us to boldly share that with others.

Marsha Hahn

Pitman United Methodist Church

Rejoice in Today

For in him we live and move and have our being. ~ Acts 17:28 (NIV)

This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

~ Psalm 118:24 (TLB)

Today look for the Lord in the ordinary, because He is always where you can see Him if you are looking for Him. Nothing is too small for His attention and nothing too big for His power. He is always the same and always present. He will speak to you if you listen in silence before Him.

Today live (be) present to the Presence because Christ's presence saturates your life. He is in you, with you, on you, and through you — all of Him in all of you. Take the knowledge of His presence with you in everything you do, everything you encounter, every word you speak, every thought you think. Today trust Him with your whole heart and embrace joy along the way in your normal day.

Christian author Mary Jean Irion writes, "Normal day, let me be aware of the treasure you are ... let me not pass you by in quest of some rare and perfect tomorrow."

This is the day the Lord has given you. Rejoice in it. Don't forget to value and treasure the days that are simply normal. Today will soon enough become yesterday. Don't let it slip away without thanks. Today praise the Lord for the gift of today because it will never come again.

Desire to be so full of God's Spirit that the fruit of His Spirit overflows from your life, pouring out into the lives of others. They will notice and be blessed. Be thankful for life — for another 24 hours to know God, to walk with Him, and to let Him touch other lives through you. It's only one day, but right now, it's the only day that matters.

Lord, help me see you in my ordinary tasks as I go through the day. Let me praise you and thank you for the gift of today. May I share your love with others.

Linda Turk

Evangelical United Methodist Church

Reprinted from *God Whispers*, a yearlong devotional book written by Linda.

For more information about the book, see page 1.

The Christmas Gift

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ~ *John 3:16 (KJV)*

As we shop for Christmas gifts, we are reminded of the greatest gift of all — the gift of Jesus Christ given to us and for us by God. All the hustle and bustle of making lists, shopping, crowds, traffic, decisions, wrapping, decorating — whew, it is overwhelming at best. Then we're reminded that we have been given the greatest gift of all — Jesus Christ.

God, without thinking or hesitation, gave us His Son who came with a mission. Born as a tiny baby in a cold, dank stable and placed in a manger, Jesus came to save you and me. Jesus was a King, but He chose to come as a baby born to poor parents. He is God, but He chose to become man to give us this gift.

There are people in our world who do not know this or want to know about Jesus. They are all caught up in the dollar amounts, the gifts, the partying, and so forth. In other words, they are caught up in the world, but they miss the whole point of the Christmas story.

We try to share Jesus when and where we can and pray that others receive the greatest gift ever given: the gift of a Son born to Mary, a young virgin, and her carpenter husband, Joseph. They accepted what was asked of them without hesitation as they trusted that God would take care of their young family. Guess what! God did.

May our hearts sing with joy over the promises that this birth gives us as we trust our Lord and His promises. So as we go about our busyness of planning and shopping, may we always remember the greatest gift ever given — Jesus Christ, Son of God, born of Mary, the One who came to save the world. He lived and died for you and me. Jesus Christ, the Christmas gift.

Lord, help us to keep Jesus at the center of our Christmas as we reflect on the true reason for the season.

Char Gaylord
Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Supernatural Help

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? ~ *Hebrews 1:14 (NIV)*

Several weeks passed and she still couldn't find it. Our daughter, Joy, had misplaced her wallet. She wasn't missing crayons, candies, or tiny doll figures that a 6-year-old might stash in her tiny purse, but rather important items a high school woman would need, like her identification cards, money, and personal information.

One morning while taking my usual walk, I suddenly thought about this missing valuable and felt prompted to pray, "Lord, I ask that your ministering angels who are sent to minister to us on our behalf would usher in that wallet — that they'd help us find it. Thank you." After praying, I dismissed the thoughts and enjoyed the remainder of my walk.

Within 20 minutes, my phone rang. It was the mom of Joy's girlfriend from school. She had found my daughter's volleyball jacket hanging in their closet from a sleepover weeks earlier, and her wallet was in the jacket pocket!

My heart excitedly fluttered! I was in awe, thanking God for moving on our daughter's behalf by appointing angels to intervene. The prompting in my heart about the need — including the specific way to pray — proved to be a significant testimony when conversing with a personal God.

Have you ever lost a treasured item and felt like it was forever gone? Please be encouraged to invite God into situations that you have no control over. We can with confidence and boldness approach Him directly in prayer for supernatural help!

Father God, may I always remember to include you in situations both within and beyond my control. With a grateful heart, thank you.

Christine Strittmatter
Fairton Christian Center

Snake in the Kitchen

You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet! ~ *Psalm 91:13 (NLT)*

When they call on me I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honor them. ~ *Psalm 91:15 (NLT)*

I had finished my volunteer work at a local thrift shop and arrived home to find a black snake in my kitchen. I went to my kitchen sink to wash my hands and what I saw was frightening! A snake was in the sink by the faucet. All I could do was scream, which alarmed the snake, and he lifted his head straight up. Fortunately, as close as my hand was to the faucet, I was not bitten.

My dog, Jasper, was gated not far from the kitchen, and he was barking nonstop. He is a beagle and has a super nose that smells all. I could tell he knew that snake was around and if he got loose he would find it.

I was able to get Jasper out of the house through another door away from the kitchen.

I called my neighbor for help, and he had a friend who was willing to try to remove the snake from inside my house. He arrived shortly and used a grabber stick and then handled the snake and took it outside. Phew! What a relief!

When I think about this experience and how scared I was, even then I knew the Lord was protecting me and would provide the help I needed. This snake reminded me of the serpent Satan, who slithers around and unexpectedly shows up and rears his ugly head and attempts “to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10 NLT).

I must admit every day now I look at my kitchen sink for that snake to return. If it does, I will be ready.

Will you be ready when the snakes come into your life? Don't allow the enemy to find you off guard. Put on your armor and stand firm. Remember God empowers you to overcome evil. Be assured that one day the devil will be cast into a fiery lake forever (Revelation 20:10).

Thank you, Lord, that when the serpent comes calling at our door, you will answer.

Sharon Constantine
Clayton Baptist Church

Pay Attention!

My son, pay attention to my words. ~ *Proverbs 4:20 (NASB)*

I put myself through college by working as a waitress. While on the job, I “attended” tables. In the original sense of the word, I “paid attention” to the people at the tables in my charge.

Paying attention involved keeping my eyes and ears focused on my customers. It involved instant obedience to their every request. It also involved keeping myself free of distractions from other waitresses — distractions such as idle chatter or anything that would cause me to take my eyes off my customers.

Like my waitressing job, living for God involves keeping our eyes and ears focused on His Word, instantly obeying His every command, and avoiding those distractions that would cause us to take our eyes off serving God.

Purpose in your heart today to give your full and undivided attention to God’s Word. As the later verse 22 in the same passage promises, God’s words “are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.”

Isn’t that reason enough to pay attention to them?

Lord, guide us as we strive every day to stay focused on you.

MaryAnn Diorio
Church of the Risen King

Revival Then and Now

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, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

~ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NIV)

In February 2023, students from all around the world experienced a multiweek outpouring at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky. It has been described as a present day revival and an awakening. I was reflecting on this event and trying to compare it to the time of Jesus.

There was no more room at the inn for Mary and Joseph in the little town of Bethlehem. Thousands came to Asbury University, and the small infrastructure of Wilmore could not hold the influx of people. It was not ready for a revival.

May we individually always be ready for revival in our hearts.

When in jail, John the Baptist sent men to confirm that Jesus was the Messiah they were seeking. Later Paul sent Timothy to the Corinthians to confirm Paul's dedication to the faith. Present day pastors sent people to Kentucky to confirm what was happening at Asbury University.

Was this real?

There was the testimony of an elderly woman, Anna, who prayed for years to witness one more revival before she died. There was Simeon who asked God and prayed in the temple to see the long-awaited Messiah before he died. Multitudes followed Jesus just to witness Him giving the Sermon on the Mount. Thousands came from all over just to witness the holiness of worship in a little chapel at Asbury.

If you had heard, would you have gone? (Or watched on digital media?)

The Holy Spirit like a wind came on to the disciples. News spread. Present day, the Holy Spirit convicted hearts to repent, and through technology like TikTok and Facebook, the good news was spread.

May we be willing to share the good news wherever we are.

One of the first evangelists, the woman at the well, left her watering pot to run into her town to spread the word that Jesus was the Messiah. The students ran to each other to spread the word to come to chapel to experience Jesus.

They ran. They didn't saunter. Let us run to spread the word!

Lord, may we always be ready with full lamps and long wicks.

Diana McMillion
North Raleigh United Methodist Church