



Joy



Desire for Joy

“Joy” is commonly defined as “a very happy feeling; great pleasure or delight.” Everyone desires happiness and joy. After ancient Israel’s destruction, the people of Israel lost their joy. Of course, they wanted their joy to be restored. As Jeremiah wrote...

📖 “Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned! ...Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old.” (*Lamentations 5:15-16, 21, NIV*)

Hope for Joy

The prophets’ good news gave reason for hope – the hope of restoration under the future Messiah.¹ The kingdom established by the Messiah would be full of peace and joy. Jeremiah wrote...

📖 “...the LORD says... ‘I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt. Again you will take up your timbrels and go out to dance with the joyful... Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.’” (*Jeremiah 31:2a, 4, 13, NIV*)

Advent of Joy

About 600 years after Jeremiah’s prophecy, the promised Messiah was born in Bethlehem. An angel announced his birth to shepherds living in the fields nearby. The angel said to them...

📖 “...I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” (*Luke 2:10-11, NIV*)

1. Read Luke 2:13-20. After the shepherds heard the angel’s message, what actions did they take? What attitudes and emotions were evident in their actions?²

Read Matthew 2:1-13. ‘Magi’³ from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star⁴ when it rose and have come to worship him.” Rather than King Herod and the Jewish leaders, it was Magi (outsiders, Gentiles from the east) who came to worship Jesus. This is interesting.



¹ ‘Messiah’ – Hebrew *māšīah*, meaning ‘anointed one.’ ‘Anoint’ means to apply oil to a person or thing. Kings, high priests, and some prophets were ‘anointed’ as a symbolic act of setting them apart for God’s service. The promised king in the Davidic line (the line of David) became known as *the Messiah* – Greek *Christos*, English ‘Christ.’

² They recognized the angel’s message as God’s truth. They ‘hurried off and found’ Mary, Joseph and Jesus. The word ‘found’ (*aneuran*) could be translated ‘searched out and found.’ They ‘spread the word’ about what they had heard and seen. They glorified and praised God. Their actions demonstrated faith, excitement, expectation and joy. Others had their own responses. Those who heard the shepherds’ testimony were ‘amazed’ (whether or not they believed). Mary ‘treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart’ (2:19). She continually contemplated these events.

³ ‘Magi’ (*magoi*) – the term could apply to a variety of men interested in astronomy, astrology, dreams, magic, and books. These men might be considered ‘wise men,’ though the Bible prohibits astrology and occultic magic (*Deut. 18:9-14; Isaiah 47:12-15*). ‘from the east’ – possibly Babylonia, Persia, or the Arabian desert.

⁴ ‘star’ – various naturalistic explanations have been offered, including planetary conjunctions (e.g., Jupiter & Saturn), supernova, and comets. Others say verse 9, which indicates that the star moved and stopped, demands a supernatural explanation. Apparently, the Magi had some knowledge of Old Testament prophecy (e.g., *Numbers 24:17*).

2. When the Magi saw the star over the place of Jesus, they were “overjoyed” (2:10). Why do you think the Magi were filled with joy, whereas Herod and the Jewish leaders were not?⁵

Basis of Joy

3. For most people, what is the basis of their joy?⁶ Under what conditions do people feel joy? In other words, what kinds of things bring happiness and joyfulness?



4. Both Christians and non-Christians experience joy for many of the same reasons. But how is “Christian joy” different? What is the basis of “Christian joy?” (e.g., see *Romans 15:13*)

God is the source of every truly good thing. So God is the ultimate basis of joy. Thus the greatest joy is a relationship with God and the enjoyment of his salvation and kingdom. A relationship with God along with the enjoyment of his salvation and kingdom are possible because of Jesus. He is the one mediator between God and humans. He is the Savior. He is the Messiah.

Realization of Joy

Believers will fully realize joy when Jesus returns (at his second advent). Until then, we should still have joy! As Paul says, “Be joyful always.” (*1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*, also see *Philippians 4:4*)

5. How can we “be joyful always”? What can we do to be more joyful in our daily lives?

- ✧ Rely on God. “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, NIV*).
- ✧ Remain (abide) in Jesus. He is the Vine and we are the branches (*John 15:5*). When we obey Jesus’ commands, as he obeyed the Father’s commands, his joy will be in us, and our joy will be complete (*15:9-11*). Faithfulness to God, in union with Christ, results in joy.
- ✧ Remember that our joy is not merely an emotion based on worldly conditions. It is given by the indwelling Holy Spirit (*1 Thess. 1:6*). True joy is a “fruit of the Spirit” (*Galatians 5:22*).
- ✧ Reflect on Jesus’ victory over evil and death. By his resurrection, he secured our complete salvation. Jesus said, “...you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (*John 16:22*).
- ✧ Realize that our salvation is being worked out even in times of trouble and pain. “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (*James 1:2, NIV*)⁷

Reflection & Application

- Do you desire joy? Do you know the Source of joy? Do you need to trust in Jesus?
- Brothers & sisters, reflect on this lesson and the referenced verses. Rejoice in your salvation!

⁵ The Magi were open to God’s revelation and followed it to where it led. Though the Jewish leaders possessed God’s written revelation (the Scriptures or Hebrew Bible), they failed to recognize its fulfillment (because of their pride, self-righteousness, and unfaithfulness to God). They were either unaware or uninterested concerning Jesus’ birth. Herod wanted to find Jesus, but only in order to kill him. King Herod was self-centered and insecure. He wanted total control, and felt threatened by this new ‘king of the Jews’ (2:2). Today, people still miss the joy of Jesus for the same reasons.

⁶ Personal joy is based on a sense of well-being and delight. In general, this sense of well-being is dependent on delightful conditions – things, thoughts, experiences, circumstances, etc.

⁷ Joy in the midst of suffering is a common theme in the Bible. See *Romans 5:1-4*; *James 1:2-4*; *1 Peter 1:3-9*; *4:12-14*.