

JOY!

“...My heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

—Psalm 16:9-11

The third candle symbolizes joy. It is often called the “Shepard’s Candle;” it is meant to remind us of the joy the shepherds must have experienced that night they got to meet their Savior face-to-face and the angel proclaimed to them: “I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be for all people.”

For starters, maybe let’s just pause and think about that for a moment. The angel said, “I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be for *ALL* people.” Those aren’t just pretty words printed on a greeting card; those words are amazing news straight from the messenger God Himself, but they must have felt like almost unbelievable news (I think even for us at times they seem too good to be true); I mean, think about it: the Messiah, the Chosen One, the Promised Seed born right in our own backyard, in a manger and accessible to *all*—even some shepherds [I’ve often heard shepherds were like the equivalent of homeless people or outcasts]! And God’s messenger was telling these shepherds *they* could go meet their Savior face-to-face; He was accessible—even to them!

These shepherds didn’t have to clean themselves up, go through a ton of rituals, say the right things, believe a certain way, act the right way etc. to go meet their Savior; the angel just showed up and told them about good news—accessible, tangible, touchable right now, for anyone; all they had to do was go and see! Can you imagine the joy?

I’ve heard many of your stories, and I know my own. Many of us come from backgrounds that have conveyed the idea that before we can approach God’s throne, before we can meet our Savior or experience His presence or the full privileges of knowing Him we need to clean up our act or at least believe a certain way or pray a certain way, and yet the Christmas story surprises us in unexpected ways. It shatters the illusions and lies that somehow we can make ourselves good enough for God—that somehow we are responsible for our salvation.

The Christmas story reveals that even *before* Jesus died for us on the cross, even before the curtain was torn in the temple upon Jesus’ death, even before we could say a prayer or believe in our Savior, God—in Christ Jesus—reached down into any and every mess we might ever find ourselves in and *He* saved us! Do you doubt that? Check it out for yourself. It’s all over Scripture, but here’s one example where Paul wrote about it:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **has blessed us** in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, **he predestined us for adoption** as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of **his will**, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. **In him we have redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, **which he lavished upon us**, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which **he set forth in Christ as a plan** for the fullness of time, **to unite***

all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...

WOW! Blessed with EVERY spiritual blessing! Chosen in Christ BEFORE the foundation of the world to be adopted by God! Through Christ, God has lavished gifts of grace and forgiveness on us and He's uniting ALL things in Christ!

If that's not "good news of great joy, which will be for **all** people," I don't know what is! And not only were we chosen in Him *before* the foundation of the world, God set the plan in motion to come to us and dwell with us before we could ever say the right things, believe the right ways: "It's by **grace** we have been saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, **it's the gift of God...**"

In this week's readings, we will follow the genealogy of Jesus—especially focusing on the women in the line of the Promised Seed. I hope you are filled with joy as you realize your salvation isn't about what *you* can do but rather it's about what *God* has *already* done in Christ Jesus! God's not afraid of entering our messes; He never has been or ever will be. Actually, He's all about entering them (like a seed planted in soil) that we might know the depths of His love & have inexpressible joy!

Jesus shows up *everywhere*—especially in the painful and messy places— for *everyone*.

Some questions you might consider while reading each day:

- What's the mess that the Promised Seed is showing up in?
- How does this particular story confirm the message of the angel to the shepherds that the gospel will be good news for "all people"?
- What can you learn about the process of joy—how joy shows up in our world and in our lives?
- What can we learn about the goodness of God in the midst of this story?

The Seed in the Dwelling Place of God

Day 1—Eve

Read Genesis 3:1-20

Day 2—Tamar

Read Genesis 38

Day 3— Rahab

Read Joshua 2:1-21 & 6:12-25

Day 4— Ruth

Read Ruth 1:1-7, 2:19-2:2, 3, 4:13-22

Day 5— Bathsheba

2 Samuel 11 & 12:1-25

Day 6— Mary

Matthew 1

Day 7— You

1 Corinthians 3:16

Revelation 21:1-5

For supplemental devotional reading, check out “The Seed in the Midst of Dirty Scandals” at:
<http://relentless-love.org/devotionals/seed-midst-dirty-scandals/>