# ADVENTAL

A 27-Day Devotional Reflections from Leaders Across the Asia-Pacific Region



# WEEK 4 JOY

# **JOY OF CHRISTMAS**

by Inocencia Piliin - Philippines/Micronesia Field Women Clergy Coordinator

What brings this Christmas celebration joyful? 2000 years ago, if we compare how fabulous our preparation of Christmas today, with the first Christmas, it was totally different. The simplicity of its celebration brought joy and inspiration to many of us.

For almost 2 years, we were shocked by the outcome of the pandemic, we failed to have church gatherings and reunions with our family. Many people around us were frustrated that caused them to feel discouraged and depressed brought by Covid-19. But today, if we try to analyze the situation and the circumstances around us, we still have reasons to be thankful. Why? Because in the first place God never abandoned us. He never let us down and He kept His promises from His Holy Word.

As we anticipate the coming celebration of Christ's birth, can we still have joy amidst this challenging times? Many people lost their job, business was bankrupt, news that sound its almost the end of the world, loss of loved ones and the difficult part is that hospitals were full of patients. Is there any excitement of looking forward to celebrating Christ's birth?

Yes, because joy is the unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart, a secret spring that the world can't see and doesn't know anything about. It flows right on through trouble.it flows through difficult circumstances. What joy will this Christmas celebration bring to us? Luke 2:10-11 says: "And the angel said unto them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

In the Christmas characters, the angels played a significant role. They sent the message to Joseph and Mary (Luke 1:26-38), to Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:8-12,) and to the magi in a dream. Now the angels appeared to the lowliest group of people in the society and those were the shepherds. Why were these shepherds included in the Christmas story? The good news of salvation is that Jesus comes to all, including the ordinary people, he comes to those with a humble heart, he accepts you for who you are and what you are. He doesn't look for qualifications, but he accepts you for who you are. These shepherds were men who live simple lives. They were staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. They were dedicated people. They perform their task though the work was too difficult, tiring and dangerous, but still they remain true to their commitment.

There are men and women during our time, who are committed to serve God they are like shepherds who are willing to sacrifice to build His Kingdom. May we find more faithful shepherds in our generation.

When the angels suddenly appeared to them, their experience was breathtaking, spectacular, magnificent overwhelming splendor because they were surprised: That's why the angels said: Do not fear, for behold I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people. For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This is the message that we need to hear today. As the world brings news of discouragement, the Word of God offers as Good News! What is the Good News?

- 1. Good news of Assurance. "Do not fear or do not be afraid. That is the clear message of God for each one of us. We should not fear what tomorrow brings. For the message of the angels of God to the shepherd was still the same and forever will remain true. We may face difficult situation brought by unavoidable circumstances. But remember always, let us not focus on the happenings of the world that we missed the opportunity to focus on the goodness of God. Do not allow fear to capture the best picture of your life but instead allow God to paint the best picture of your life. By trusting Him, He can erase the bad memories and replace with a beautiful one.
- 2. Good news of Salvation. The Savior has been born. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Jesus is our savior and our Messiah, He saved us from sin, trouble and worries. All we need to do is to come before Him with thanksgiving in our hearts that once again He did wondrous things in our lives by saving us, giving us hope, strengthened our faith, and increased our love for Him.

It is my prayer that may each one of us will have a meaningful Christmas Day. Let us celebrate Christmas with our loved ones and with the fellowship of believers around.

# **RESTORING JOY**

by Jill Riggins - Missionary

The context of Psalm 51 is the prophet Nathan's confrontation of David's sin. King David royally messed up. And he thought he got away with it. When he got caught he was broken, devastated. Feeling much more than remorse or regret, he didn't just wish he didn't get caught. He was ready to do anything to make things right.

Because ultimately, it wasn't about David. It was about God. David remembered the joy of the Lord – his strength – even as a lowly young shepherd boy. Those long-ago simple days with the sheep, a staff, and a harp ... and the Lord. There had been joy then he had known deep in his soul, the joy of communing in fellowship with God. And now David was beginning to realize what it felt like when that joy was gone. A simple life replaced with wealth – but wealth wasn't enough. Anonymity replaced with fame – but fame wasn't enough. Deep satisfying joy of the Lord – replaced only with crushing guilt and shame. And David rediscovered the secret of true joy: right relationship with God.

Our bones can feel crushed. We can be overwhelmed by guilt and shame. But we are one repentant step away from joy restored.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.

Psalm 51:12-13 NIV

# JOY - I WILL SING THE GOODNESS OF GOD

by Cryz Colorado - District Superintendent, Metro Luzon District (Philippines)

Psalm 126 is a psalm that speaks JOY. The Israelites were rejoicing and singing with praises because of the fulfilled promise of God that He will deliver them from the hands of the Babylonians. During their captivity in Babylon they were filled with tears, hardships, and sufferings. The author of the psalm likened it "sowing in tears." Like a farmer who bears the seeds for sowing, it is difficult and burdensome. But after some months of hard labor, they rejoice when they bring home their harvest.

When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem, they all remembered all the goodness of God to them during their captivity. They were convinced that it is not them but it is God's grace and power that brought them back to their liberty. Their sorrows and tears were changed to rejoicing and singing, "I will sing of the goodness of God."

A pastor and father of a child with autism was once asked, "What is your wish in life that will make you truly happy?" The pastor father replied with tears, "I like to talk to my daughter when we get to heaven." The daughter cannot speak but the pastor's greatest joy will be in heaven where he could talk to her.

Our God is faithful and He is good. Even in the midst of our sufferings, even in the midst of the world condition today, even in our present tears, God gives us the greatest joy when He gave Jesus Christ, his Son to be our Lord and Savior.

Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!
He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.

Psalm 126:5-6 NIV

# A SIGNAL OF JOY

by Terence Lustana - South East Asia Field NYI Coordinator

We named our firstborn Jubilee, and she really lives up to her name. She is a bundle of joy who loves to run and sing constantly. We joke that we have yet to find her off switch.

Recently, she caught her first-ever cold which developed into pneumonia. Our little happy girl was now unable to walk and talk. She stayed in bed for days. It was like all of her joy was sucked out. We had to wait for her to recover, and waiting is never fun.

Then one morning, we heard a small, sweet singing voice coming from Jubilee's bed.

"Yes, Jesus loves me ..."

The relief her mother and I felt hearing that voice brought us to tears. As we breathed that sigh of relief, it was like a breath that revived the joy back into our family. Hearing that small voice, we knew that everything was going to be okay.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, we cannot imagine the massive relief it brought upon the entire world. The people of God had been waiting for the Messiah for centuries, and here comes God's messenger announcing the long-awaited arrival. It was like the world was sick and the angel's voice revived the joy to all people. It was like a sigh of relief saying, "Everything is going to be okay."

Are you in a season of anticipation, waiting for a simple voice signaling joy? Perhaps that signal won't be what you expected it'd sound like. Perhaps it will take longer than you want. Perhaps the joy will come in a surprising manner, like an infant lying in a manger.

When the angel brought the good news of great joy, it was for all people - yes, even you. Breathe a sigh of relief. Everything is going to be okay. It may not be okay today or tomorrow, but it will be okay.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Luke 2:10 NIV

# **JOY**

### by Mark Eugenio - Chancellor, Chapman International College

December reminds me of a group of children singing "Joy to the World" in front of our house. Audibly parts of the stanza were their version, but you can sense their joy as they sing at the top of their lungs. Indeed, songs and music we sing this special season mirror the joy and festivity.

It is almost impossible to imagine the birth of Jesus Christ or Christmas season without joy. In fact, the word joy and Christmas are inseparable. The Gospels underscore this fact: as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb "leaped for joy" (Lk. 1:44); the angels brought "goodnews of great joy (Lk. 2:10); the Magi "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" upon seeing the star where the child was (Mt. 2:10).

Wait! The joy did not just happen at the time of announcement and the birth event. I believe the intention is lasting. It shall be a life of joy for those who receive it. Speaking to his disciples, Jesus states "I am the true vine" (Jn. 15:1). The vine, found everywhere in ancient Israel, beautifully captures the relationship between God and His people. It emphasized our (branches) complete dependence and need for unbroken connection to the true vine. Joy, without Jesus, is not true joy. So while John 15:1 is not a nativity verse, it, nonetheless, reminds us of the very reason for this season, Jesus, and the joy he brings. It is joy that last as long as we are connected to the true vine, Jesus.

What time is more proper than this season to find true joy at the coming of the Savior. Let the suffering world joyfully shout, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!"

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

John 15:1 NIV