



CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIONAL MISSION COUNCIL

WEEKLY UPDATE

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Advent 3 - The Sunday of Joy

Reasons to Rejoice

by Mrs. Sonia Wallace

The **Season of Advent** reminds us of the importance of spiritual preparedness, of the readying of our hearts and minds for the life transforming presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

On the **1st Sunday in Advent**, we lit the candle of **Hope** in our churches as a reminder that as followers of Jesus Christ we are the people of hope.

On the **2nd Sunday in Advent**, we lit the candle of **Peace** as a reminder that we are the people of a special kind of peace, one that transcends all understanding.

The 3rd candle today reminds us that we are also the people of joy. Joy is fundamentally different from happiness. Happiness is a temporary feeling dependent on favorable circumstances and events that seldom last and can change quickly.

Joy, on the contrary, is a choice, a decision of our inner being, the recognition, and appreciation of God's presence in our lives, the treasuring of our relationship with God. In addition to this, it is also the recognition of God's many favors to us, the celebration of God's goodness and love, forgiveness and mercy, God's gifts, promises, and countless blessings.

In our fallen world, almost everything is about chasing the promise of happiness in some way or another and many lives are ruined directly or indirectly in its relentless pursuit. Let us remember not to fall into the same trap.

Let us also remember those who find it difficult to experience this joy because of their loss, suffering, or circumstances. Ours is the sacred duty not only to have but also to share this joy – and do it so in a sensitive and meaningful way.

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”
(Philippians 4:4)*



This is the season of Advent, a time when we primarily celebrate the coming of Jesus as a babe. It is also a time when we remember that there will be a second coming of Jesus to rule and reign. In our culture, we celebrate Advent as a time to share love and joy and decorate with amazing displays of lights to remind us that Jesus is the light of the world. Even while experiencing a pandemic, the excitement of the season brings with it the singing of carols, special decorations, family or office get-togethers and the pleasant expressions of Merry Christmas to those we meet.

We began the season of Advent with a reflection on Hope. Last week we focused on Peace. During this third week in Advent, we turn our attention to Joy, and a few passages from the book of Isaiah, Psalms, and the New Testament will guide our thoughts.

Background to Isaiah's prophecy

Isaiah was the outspoken prophetic voice for God during the reign of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He has been called by authors the “prince of prophets” and is also known as the “evangelical prophet.” He declared many prophecies of Jesus' coming, character, ministry, and suffering, seven hundred years before Jesus' actual birth, which he also predicted. He further warned that Judah would suffer the doom of being exiled to Babylon owing to their defiant practice of idolatry.

Isaiah's prophecies did not stop at captivity, he further predicted the good news that deliverance was assured. In chapter 42:6 he prophesied that there would be a called One, for a righteous purpose. This One would be given for “a covenant to the people (Israel) and for a light to the nations (Gentiles). Many in Judah therefore, looked expectantly for the One who would come. This One would be the Messiah (‘messiah’ means the ‘Anointed One’).

Isaiah's Prophecy (Isaiah 61:1-2)

*“1 The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...”*

In this passage, Isaiah prophesied to Israel of the certainty that the Spirit of the Lord God would be upon the One who would come to save them and be their king. His coming should therefore be good news. The prophet also declared the mission which the Anointed One was to fulfill. It involved preaching good tidings (good news), binding and healing, proclaiming liberty and freedom from prisons as well as opening the eyes of those who were bound. This description of the mission conveyed that it would involve physical and spiritual relevance. Judah was already a spiritual captive to idolatry and unrighteousness. When in physical captivity to foreign nations they would not only be spiritually but also physically poor, oppressed, brokenhearted, and bound.

Revelation of the Messiah and the Christ

Jesus, in launching His ministry quoted this passage from the book of Isaiah. He then stated (Luke 4:21), *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* By saying this, Jesus confirmed that He is the Jewish Messiah, who was predicted and for whom the nation waited. Later, as news of His ministry spread, we read in Mark 8:29 where Peter, one of His disciples testified *"You are the Christ."* Like the word Messiah, Christ means the Anointed One. The revelation of the Anointed One to begin His ministry at this time was a time of "God's favor", introducing the Good News of God's grace.

Revelation of the Messiah unrecognized

In Jesus' context, He confirmed His Messiahship at a time when Judah did indeed long for deliverance from the ruling power – Rome. It was difficult to recognize the year of the Lord's favor while under oppression, yet this was God's appointed time. Jesus was in Galilee, in His local community and to their disbelief, the revelation of Messiahship came from the lips of Jesus, one they knew as Joseph's son, who was also under oppression as they were. Instead of accepting the good news with great joy, they threw Him out of the city.

Is there a message for us here?

Yes, for there is a similarity to the time of Jesus' birth. He too was isolated when no one could make room for his birth, so he was born in a stable. Everyone was occupied with fulfilling the order of an oppressive regime to travel to their hometowns to register. Those around were oblivious to the good news of His birth. Too often in our calamities, we look only to the circumstances around us and fail to hear or discern the revelation of God's Good News.

There is also an uncanny resemblance to our current situation where around the world we are occupied with the oppressive effects of Covid-19. It is locking down cities, ruining businesses, driving economies into recession, and causing deaths. The unpleasant impacts have seemingly overtaken us, but just as many missed Jesus' birth and failed to receive or recognize the true identity of the Messiah, we could be missing salient messages from God at this time. I encourage you to give attention to reading God's Word and take time to hear from God in meditation and prayer, especially during this Advent season.

Isaiah's Messianic passage includes an evangelistic mandate

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, the evangelist's mission statement is regarded as the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20,

"... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

A very simple representation of the command in Matthew would be three-pronged - go, baptize, and teach. As followers of Jesus Christ, our mandate is expanded by the Messiah's mission expressed in Isaiah. The prophecy touches on issues such as justice and equity and sets the example for us to seek after the restoration of the exploited and oppressed. We are sent to the poor, afflicted, brokenhearted, sick, bound, and imprisoned. We must seek both physical and spiritual freedom whenever and wherever we preach the Good News of salvation.

Isaiah's Prophecy fulfilled and restoration to the land of Judah described

As Isaiah predicted, the exile to Babylon happened in 587/586 BC and some of the exiles who experienced famine and suffering returned to Judah. The physical and spiritual freedom we speak of is clearly described in their experience which is expressed in song in Psalm 126. The major points to note here are:

1. Return to the land was a return to God with great joy: In vs.1 upon return from captivity, the Psalm paraphrased -it was like a "dream" come through. Verse 2 describes their jubilation as their mouths were filled with laughter and singing. The nations around testified *"The Lord has done great things for them..."* and those who returned gave testimony to the nations around, stating also *"The Lord has done great things for us."* Hebrew words for joy mean gladness, rejoicing, mirth or laughter. Those returning could sing and laugh for they were restored to the land and were experiencing 'pure joy.' Baker's Dictionary of Theology states "Pure joy is joy in God as both its source and object."

2. Should physical captivity return as expressed in Ps. 126 vs. 4, the spiritual state is sustained with seeds of righteousness or right living. Verses 5 and 6 state where the spiritual return to God continues *"those who sow in tears shall reap in joy and singing"*, and *"He who goes forth bearing seed and weeping [at needing his precious supply of grain for sowing] shall doubtless come again with rejoicing."* Jesus too saw persecution and death turned to joy. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus *"for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

The Good News accepted/realized brings joy even in calamity



At advent, in the midst of a pandemic, we are reminded that there is good news. The Good News is that the One sent by the Father to provide the way of salvation is here. Recall the message of the angels to the shepherds at His birth - *"I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."* This joy is not dispelled by a pandemic. It is the joy of the Lord.

Savannah United Church Highlights

Taking the Gospel message (Good News) to the poor, afflicted bound, or oppressed brings them the opportunity to experience joy unspeakable and full of glory that only Jesus gives. The Good News of salvation breaks chains of bondage spiritually, even where circumstances remain challenging. Jesus stated in John 15:11 *"These things I have spoken to you that My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full."* Jesus Joy is given to those who receive salvation and obediently carry out the discipleship ministry as He commanded. For all who receive the Good News, Jesus prayed that His joy would be fulfilled in us. (Jn. 17:13). This joy is priceless as it has an eternal future when we will share this joy with King Jesus at His second advent.

Today we have journeyed from Isaiah's Messianic prophecy to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, from the pandemic of brokenness and affliction to restoration and joy. Today could be your day to experience the joy Jesus guarantees. So please, go to Him in prayer, ask Him to come into your heart and your situation, cleanse you of sin, and give you His joy.

POST COVID YOUTH LINK UP

On December 4, 2020 over 50 young people from our congregations in the Cayman Islands Regional Mission Council gathered for a Post Covid Youth Link Up at the Elmslie Memorial United Church in George Town. Since the pandemic forced us to cancel the regular youth activities for 2020, such an event as this was long overdue and much looked forward to by both our youth as well as our youth leaders. The evening was filled with a lot of fun, food and fellowship. At the end of the event Rev. Euthman Wray, Vice-Chair of Children and Youth MAT encouraged all those to strike the right balance between the many opportunities, demands, and needs in their lives.



On Sunday November 22, 2020 Chavon McPherson, Abigail Wildman and Zoe Wildman were baptized at Spotts Beach.



They were received into our membership on Sunday December 6, 2020 along with Kemar Ferron, Karen Osbourne, and Tameka Linton-Brooks.



Girls Brigade Christmas

by Rev. Dr. Yvette Noble-Bloomfield

The Girls' Brigade of the Cayman Islands held their Christmas on Sunday, December 6, 2020, at the Elmslie Memorial Church. The Service was themed, 'Be a Light for Peace and Healing for the World'. Over one hundred girls, officers, chaplains and parents gathered and participated heartily in the worship experience. The service was led by the National Chairperson Ms. Debbie McLaughlin and the Chair of Council, the Rev. Rohan Forrester led the girls in prayer.



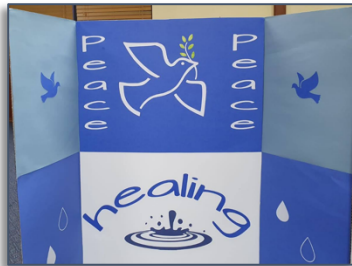
One very powerful highlight of the service was the presentation of the posters made by the girls in each company depicting the light that brings peace and healing to the world.



North Side Company



West Bay Company



Bodden Town Company



George Town Company



Savannah Company

The National Chaplin, Rev. Dr. Yvette Noble- Bloomfield did an engaging interactive presentation on the theme, encouraging the girls to shine their light into the world to bring peace and healing.



The North Side Company singing a special song

The offering received will be shared with a family in need in the District of North Side and with the people of Honduras who recently suffered loss following the devastation of the two hurricanes. The girls enjoyed a time of fellowship in the Hall following the service.

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 10. (Thursday)

Cayman national Choir Concert – 7:00pm Elmslie M.

December 13. (Sunday) 3rd Sunday of Advent (JOY)

Advent Cantata – 10:00am – Savannah U.

Children's Christmas Program – 5:00pm South Sound U.

December 17. (Thursday)

Seniors' Tea Party – 4:30pm John Gray M.

December 19. (Saturday)

Christmas Community Meal – 10:30am John Gray M.

December 20. (Sunday) 4th Sunday of Advent (LOVE)

Children's Program – 10:30am John Gray M.

Choir & Youth Christmas Program – 10:30am Elmslie M.

Youth Christmas Program – 10:00am Savannah U.

Children & Youth Christmas Program – 9:00am William Pouchie M.

Children & Youth Christmas Program – 11:00am Webster M.

Children & Youth Christmas Program – 9:30am Gun Bay U.

Children & Youth Christmas Program – 11:00am East End U.

Choir Cantata (by Savannah U. Choir)– 7:00pm at the Crighton's Gardens



Let us continue to remember in our prayers those God has placed on our hearts, especially Rev. Donovan Myers and his family.



on Radio Cayman 89.9
every Sunday at 7:45 am

December 13, 2020
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