

**GOT JOY?**

Having trouble saying "Merry Christmas!" these days? Merriment involves a choice to rise above cares and troubles, choosing to go with optimistic and positive things rather than the "nattering nabobs of negativity." So let's be realistic. Because it's Christmas!

The third week of Advent focuses on the "joy" aspects of the coming of Christ. Isaiah 35 presents five aspects of joy to help you see the reality of joy in Jesus. Even today.

**1- REJOICING JOY** - God speaks through Isaiah about seven hundred years before Christ. *"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God."* God's disobedient people were oppressed, exiled, downtrodden.

But God points to peace. Hope. Joy. Oppression shall cease! The Spirit of God will not only restore His people but also His land. Just as the people once passed through a desert in their exodus from sin, so He will bring them to the fulness of His promises. When we enlighten the darkness of winter with sparkling lights, we signal: Joy is here. The Lord is coming!

**2- RECOMPENSE & JOY** - *"Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.'" This is good news! The enemies of God's people will be vanquished, receiving what is due their animus toward God.*

So lay aside weariness. Don't dwell on anxieties. Don't let fear overtake. Choose to be strong in the Lord and the strength of His power. You have His promises. Believe them. Act upon them. When God says "fear not" then His deliverance is near! Look to His light, and persevere through dark times and trials. God "will" come and He will "save" you. Promise!

**3- RELEASE & JOY** - *"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy."* God came in the flesh to deliver His people. God Himself came in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels record fulfilling His mission to set His people free, releasing them from all that bound them (as in Luke 4:16-21, 7:22, Matthew 11:5 etc).

*"For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes."* The first coming of Christ was to save His people, but His second coming will bring judgment and then restoration to the earth (as in Romans 8:18-28, 2Peter 3, Revelation 21). All in God's time and purpose.

**4- REDEEMED JOY** - *"And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there."* Redemption is coming!

The forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, proclaimed a similar message, to prepare the way of the Lord. All obstacles were removed for God's cleansing and restoring. And the people turned in repentance and faith in the Savior, who redeems His people, healing from sin!

**5- EVERLASTING JOY** - *"And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."* God did more than just return His people from exile. He pointed them to their real redemption, the payment of their sins by their Savior. And what God inaugurated in the first coming of Christ will be consummated in His second coming.

All the deliverances of God's people pictured in their Old Testament history are personally fulfilled in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Promised One of God has come, and this gives His people great hope and great joy. For you, for this day! We have His presence within us now, as we await being with Him in His presence. Meantime, be filled with His joy! ☐