

“The Reason for Our Joy”

A common definition of joy is “the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; elation.” The passage read at our Advent Candle today was actually two brief hymns celebrating joy. The first one celebrated the deliverance from great distress, perhaps recalling how God had saved their ancestors from Egyptian slavery and delivered them. The previous chapter in Isaiah offered the great Messianic prophecy regarding a shoot coming from the stump of Jesse, indicating that the Christ would be a descendant of King David, the revered leader from their past.

Joy exudes, because God has intervened and proven once again to be greater than any obstacle. Those who originally sang this hymn drew water regularly; in order to live, they had to continue to go to the well. Recognizing that we have cause for joy because of the salvation offered to us, can sustain us like drawing water from the well. Recalling the times of deliverance and realizing that we are not alone are those exceptionally good or satisfying moments (to quote the earlier definition) that bring about the emotion of great delight. God is the reason for our joy.

The second hymn of our passage underscores the *nearness* of God. While we know that God is holy and certainly unable to be conformed to any image which we might create, we, like the Israelites of old, can find joy knowing that a God who is that vast and mighty can also be found in *our* midst. We are never alone.

God’s very nature, being compassionate, constant, and gracious becomes reason for joy. Those in Isaiah’s time remembered that God had saved them in the past, and now as Assyria was threatening their conquest, they could depend upon God for their future. Joy could be found in knowing that God would *continue* to save them; even in retrospect knowing that the descendants of those singing this hymn would be taken into exile. Even when the bad times would come, joy could be gained by remembering that God was still with them.

We can take great delight, because God has already done gloriously. We have joy, because God is among us, even now. And because of this pattern and the unfailing promises of God, we know that we can be filled with elation in the future, because God will be with us, providing salvation even in the most dire of circumstances. Surface misfortunes may set us back; momentary lapses of stormy times may attempt to color our outlooks. But true joy lasts, because it is of God. This joyfulness becomes more than a surface feeling that remains contingent upon circumstantial thermometers. The joy we have as Christians, the joy of our celebration today, results from whom God is, from what God has already done, and from how that God will always be. Thanks be to God, the reason for our joy.
AMEN.