

A Joy Like No Other

Fourth Sunday of Advent – Joy Rooted in God's Faithfulness

This devotional guide is designed for **house groups** or **individual reflection**. It follows the themes and Scriptures from the service at *St Paul's, Milngavie*, inviting you to sit with the text, reflect honestly, and allow Advent joy to reshape your vision of God, yourself, and the world.

Opening Prayer

Faithful God,

In this season of Advent, we come as we are — carrying hope and hesitation, joy and weariness. We ask for open hearts and attentive spirits as we reflect on your Word. Where our lives feel uncertain, speak peace. Where joy feels distant, draw near. May your Holy Spirit help us to see again who you are and to trust your promises, even before we see their fulfilment.

We place this time in your hands. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Take time to read the passages slowly. If you are in a group, consider reading them aloud, perhaps with different voices.

- **Habakkuk 3:17–18**
- **Luke 1:39–56** (Mary Visits Elizabeth & Mary's Song – the Magnificat)

You may wish to read the Luke passage twice, allowing space between readings.

Scripture Summary

Habakkuk 3:17–18 offers a bold declaration of faith. The prophet names a future marked by loss, scarcity, and unanswered questions — and yet chooses joy. This joy is not denial of suffering but a deep trust in God’s saving presence.

Luke 1:39–56 brings us into a quiet meeting between two women on the margins: Mary and Elizabeth. In this Spirit-filled encounter, Elizabeth recognises Mary’s child as Lord, and Mary responds with a song of praise. The Magnificat proclaims a God who overturns expectations — lifting the humble, filling the hungry, and remaining faithful to promises made long ago.

Together, these Scriptures show us that **biblical joy is not dependent on circumstances**. It flows from the presence, promises, and purposes of God.

Sermon Recap – A Joy Like No Other

Advent is a season of contrasts: light and darkness, anticipation and waiting, joy and sorrow. The sermon explored how Scripture refuses to separate joy from hardship. Instead, it reveals a joy that is often born *within* struggle, not after it.

Mary’s song does not arise from comfort or certainty. She is young, vulnerable, and facing an uncertain future. Yet she rejoices because God has seen her. Her joy is rooted

in who God is — faithful, merciful, just — not in how secure her life feels.

The Magnificat reveals a God who reverses the values of the world: scattering the proud, lifting the humble, filling the hungry, and remembering the overlooked. This joy is prophetic. It dares to imagine a world shaped by God's mercy rather than human power.

Like Habakkuk, Mary rejoices before the outcome is visible. Joy becomes an act of trust — a declaration that God is still at work.

This Advent joy has a name: **Jesus**. He is not only the reason for joy but its very source. A joy like no other — steady, deep, and unshakeable.

Reflection Questions

Take time with these questions. There is no rush.

1. Habakkuk chooses joy even when everything appears to be failing. What circumstances in your life make joy feel difficult right now?
2. Mary rejoices not because her life is easy, but because God has seen her. What does it mean to you to be *seen by God*?
3. The Magnificat describes a God who lifts the humble and fills the hungry. Where do you notice these reversals — or long for them — in today's world?
4. Joy and sorrow often sit side by side. Where have you experienced both at the same time?
5. Mary's joy looks forward — trusting God's promises before fulfilment. What promises of God do you need to hold onto in this season?

Action – Living Advent Joy

Joy in Scripture is never passive. It shapes how we live.

Consider one simple, intentional action this week:

- **Practice trust:** Each day, name one situation you place into God's hands, even without answers.
- **Practice attention:** Look for those who may feel overlooked or unheard, and offer presence or kindness.
- **Practice praise:** Begin or end each day by naming one reason to rejoice in God, regardless of circumstances.
- **Practice justice:** Learn about or pray for those affected by injustice, and consider how your faith calls you to respond.

Let joy become a quiet but courageous act of faith.

Closing Prayer

God of mercy and faithfulness,

Thank you for the joy you give — a joy that does not deny pain but stands firm within it. As Mary trusted your promises and Habakkuk rejoiced before relief appeared, help us to anchor our lives in who you are.

Send us out shaped by Advent hope: humble in spirit, attentive to others, and confident in your love. May the joy of Christ dwell deeply within us, guiding our words, our actions, and our witness.

We offer ourselves again to you. Amen.