



Advent 4: The Candle of Joy

In looking at the four candles representing Advent, we want to ensure our focus is on the spiritual lessons to be learned.

***Joy to the world! The Lord is come, let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing***

These wonderful words beautifully sum up this Candle of Joy. The coming of Jesus is the fulfilment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament that promised a Messiah would come to deliver his people. Joy, in its fuller, spiritual meaning expresses God's goodness. It is a deep-rooted, inspired happiness. The Bible says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10), and in Galatians 5:22, love, joy and peace are three fruits of the spirit that we should display. In Isaiah 52:7 we read: ***"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"*** What a fantastic verse!

- Do we, in the way we live, demonstrate the good tidings of great joy?
- Can we honestly say God reigns in our lives?

Read Luke 2:1-20

It doesn't matter how many times we read it or hear it sung; the joy of the shepherds shines through. In verse 13-14 we read: Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others, the armies of heaven, all praising God and saying, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men.*" What a sight and sound it must have been. In the time of Jesus, shepherds stood on the bottom rung of the Palestinian social ladder. They shared the same unenviable status as tax collectors and dung sweepers. Only Luke mentions them. This makes it even more remarkable that God didn't declare it to the Priests or the higher echelons of society, but rather he wanted shepherds to be the one to take this wonderful news to Bethlehem.

- What does this tell us about how God views us?

- Do you realise that God loves us despite who we are or what we've been? Your earthly status means nothing to him. 'All' God asks of us is that we come in sincere repentance and give our lives over to him. This is the starting point but for many people it is asking too much, hence my emphasis on 'all'.
- Using that word in another way, God does want 'all' of us, not just the parts we want to give. The Matt Redman song we sing, tells us what we must offer to God.

*I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
Pouring out the oil of love, as my worship to you
In surrender I must give my every part
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart
Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a Friend, to so loving a King?*

According to the Law, male offspring were to be circumcised on the eighth day. After 40 days, the mother had to complete her rites of purification which required the baby being brought to the temple and a sacrifice made as a sin offering. The smallest sacrifice, for those who were poor, was a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons and this is what was offered by Joseph and Mary, indicating they were not a wealthy family.

Verses 25-35 describes the confirmation given by Simeon that this was indeed the promised one for Israel: *“Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.’”*

It is not surprising that Mary and Joseph marvelled at what was said but the last part: *“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”*, must have left them wondering what the future held.

- How remarkable was this prophecy in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus?

- Does it increase your faith to realise how God's word is confirmed time, and time again?

The Candle of Joy represents Mary, the mother of Jesus. Clearly, she would be joyful at his safe delivery and later surprised by the understanding of the scriptures and the ability of Jesus to debate with the learned men. However, as we are told about the visit of the shepherds, it also says that Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The foretelling of his birth by the angel Gabriel, the joy of the shepherds, and later the visit of the Magi, the wise men, meant Mary knew that this child was different. God's plan which was first revealed in Genesis 3:15 was coming to fruition.

- This Christmas time pray that God will give you joy for the wonderful gift God has given to us. Whatever is happening around us remember:

**GOD IS A GOD OF HOPE, PEACE, LOVE AND JOY
SHOWN TO US IN SENDING HIS SON, JESUS TO THE EARTH FOR OUR SALVATION**

Prayer:

**Father, thank you for sending Jesus, our hope, our peace our love and our joy.
We pray our hearts will be full of thankfulness and praise, and may Jesus be the
centre of all our celebrations.**

