

CLOSING PRAYER

Come, Lord, source of joy.
Move us to be good news in our world
and to stand alongside our sisters and brothers in need.

Come, Lord, source of joy, lead us in your ways
as together we make a change so all people may rejoice and be glad.
Come, Lord, source of joy.

CAFOD Advent prayers



WARNING.....WARNING: ADVENT VIRUS

Be on the alert for symptoms of inner Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. The hearts of a great many have already been exposed to this virus and it is possible that people everywhere could come down with it in epidemic proportions. This could pose a serious threat to what has, up to now, been a fairly stable condition of conflict in the world.

Some signs and symptoms of **The Advent Virus**:

- A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences
- An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment
- A loss of interest in judging other people
- A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others
- A loss of interest in conflict
- A loss of the ability to worry (this is a very serious symptom)
- Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation
- Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.
- Frequent attacks of smiling
- An increasing tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen
- An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it



LET US PRAY ADVENT

WEEK 3: JOY

INTRODUCTION

The theme of our third session is Joy.

We hope that you will find this a welcoming oasis of peace for us to pray, to imagine, to rest and to dream as we prepare with joy for the coming of the Christ child into our midst this Advent. We give thanks for the God who always journeys beside us, rejoicing with us in times of joy and holding us in his loving embrace in moments of pain and sadness.

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew.

Pope Francis *Evangelii Gaudium* [1], November 2013

CHOOSE JOY

Joy is essential to the spiritual life. When we are not joyful, our thoughts and words cannot bear fruit. Jesus reveals to us God's love so that his joy may become ours and that our joy may become complete.

Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing – sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death – can take that love away. Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God's love for us.

Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us.

Henri Nouwen

MAKING TIME FOR JOY

So often we treat what is most life-giving as the least consequential, somehow less deserving than our "real" work. Song, art, poetry, dance, community, the sheer pleasure of being together — all the ways we celebrate, all the ways we embody hope, all the ways we bear witness to the God who is still creating in and through us: how frequently do we treat these as luxuries, turning to them only if we have time enough, energy enough, resources enough after everything else has been done? How often do we wait until we have joy enough, light enough, inclination enough?

It can naturally become difficult to celebrate when we are too tired, too busy, too overwhelmed by the state of the world or the circumstances of our own lives. But this is when it becomes especially important to be with those who will stoke our hope and remind us that our lives are bound together.

If this season teaches us anything, it is that even in the dark there is cause to celebrate. Even in sorrow. Even in lack. Even when there is too much to do. Even when we don't feel like it. These days assure us that if we have lost hope, there are those who are hoping for us. If we are in darkness, Christ seeks us even there. If we are aching for light, it is on its way. If we are weary, there is a fiesta waiting for us, and friends to rejoice with, both far and near.

Adapted from **Jan Richardson** *Curious about Joy*
A Women's Christmas Retreat 2024 www.janrichardson.com

READING AND REFLECTION

Jim Wallis, one of the founders of the Sojourners community in the US with a focus on prayer and social justice, tells a story about a colleague who went to Central America to serve in a village there. The community faced enormously difficult challenges, and she worked constantly, labouring day and night to help bring change to the village.

One day, some of the people in the community came to her. *Why do you not join us in our fiestas?* they asked. *Why do you not come to sit with us on our porches in the evening?*

There's too much to do! the woman replied. *I don't have enough time.*

Oh, they said to her. *You're one of those.*

One of whose? the woman asked.

You are one of those who come to us and work and work and work, they said. *Soon you will grow tired, and you will leave. The ones who stay — they are the ones who have learned to sit with us on our porches in the evening and who come to our fiestas.*

The woman took the story to heart. She went to the fiestas. She sat with her friends on their porches in the evening. And she stayed. And when Jim told this story she was still there.

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A BLESSING WE MAKE TOGETHER

The joy that animates the characters of Advent and Christmas is something distinctly other than a personal joy they have kept for themselves. This is the joy that infuses creation. They know that joy is what becomes possible when we turn toward one another; that it is a blessing we make together.

When Elizabeth calls out in welcome to Mary, and the child she is carrying leaps with joy; when Mary raises her voice in the Magnificat; when Zechariah sings his canticle; when Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the temple, and the prophets Anna and Simeon cry out in recognition and delight — each one radiates the joy that courses through them; something they have embraced, not by resisting the world but by entering more deeply into it, so that they can welcome the God who shows up in the midst of it.

Jan Richardson, from *Curious about Joy*,
A Women's Christmas Retreat 2024 www.janrichardson.com

REFLECTION

In *The Book of Joy*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu offers this blessing, reminding us of the joy of abiding in God's love:

Dear Child of God, you are loved with a love that nothing can shake, a love that loved you long before you were created, a love that will be there long after everything has disappeared. You are precious, with a preciousness that is totally quite immeasurable. And God wants you to be like God. Filled with life and goodness and laughter—and joy.

God, who is forever pouring out God's whole being from all eternity, wants you to flourish. God wants you to be filled with joy and excitement and ever longing to be able to find what is so beautiful in God's creation: the compassion of so many, the caring, the sharing.

And God says, Please, my child, help me. Help me to spread love and laughter and joy and compassion. And you know what, my child? As you do this—hey, presto—you discover joy. Joy, which you had not sought, comes as the gift, as almost the reward for this non-self-regarding caring for others.