

The Magi, royal astrologers, came to the king's palace seeking to worship the new king. But instead, they found King Herod who was not at all joyful at the news.

Jesus birth defied the Magi's assumption that the king would be in a palace. Are there any assumptions you've held about Jesus that proved to be wrong? If so, how did that challenge your faith or joy?

3. Jubilee – the Year of the Lord's Favor

Luke 4:18, 21 NLT - 18 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, ... 21 Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

When Jesus read from Isaiah, He was referencing the year of Jubilee when debts were forgiven, and slaves were granted their freedom.

Those who had suffered the greatest losses had the greatest cause to rejoice during Jubilee. In what ways has God given you freedom and favor in the midst of your losses?

WRAP-UP

The source of our joy is not our circumstances. It is in the announcement of Emmanuel, God with us. Because he has rescued us from sin and death, we can trust Him even when we don't understand and can't control our circumstances.

Memory Verse

*Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy.
- Psalm 126:5 NLT*

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____

Challenge- Sometimes our greatest joy comes when we bring joy to others. Ask God how He might use you to bring joy to someone this week.

“Joy: Why Shepherds Rejoice and Kings Panic” Advent – Week #3

INTRODUCTION

The first two lines of a familiar Christmas carol tell us the story behind two reactions to Jesus' birth.

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king.”

To those who were awaiting the coming of the Lord the announcement of Jesus' birth was a cause to rejoice. All Israel had been anticipating the arrival of their Messiah for centuries. But if Jesus was going to be received as king, what about the one who was already in power at the time, King Herod? For him this was not a reason for joy. Those whose hope is only in this world don't share that joy. But if we are among those who are looking for the Messiah, then we join with those who rejoice in the coming of King Jesus.

Ice Breaker

Whose visit would bring you the greatest joy right now?

Key Passage

Psalm 126:1-6 NLT - 1 A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem. When the LORD brought back his exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream! 2 We were filled with laughter, and we sang for joy. And the other nations said, "What amazing things the LORD has done for them." 3 Yes, the LORD has done amazing things for us! What joy! 4 Restore our fortunes, LORD, as streams renew the desert. 5 Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. 6 They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with the harvest.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Progression of God's Joy

Psalm 126 was a song to be sung as God's people ascended the mount of the Lord's temple. It was a time for rejoicing and drawing near to God. As we draw near to God this Advent season, we can also rejoice just as the people who ascended to the temple did.

- *The psalm begins by looking back to God's rescue of His people. If you were to look back on the day God rescued you, what do you remember about the circumstances that brought you to that point? What were your feelings or experiences when you accepted Jesus as your savior?*
- *After remembering their rescue, the people of God declared the great things God had done for them in Psalm 126. What are some of the things God has done for you that still cause you to rejoice?*
- *At the conclusion of this part of the psalm there is a plea for God to change their circumstances. We can rejoice that we have a God who cares for us and about us. What circumstances are you asking God to change for you?*

2. Who Rejoices?

Luke 2:1,3-7 NLT - 1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ... 3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. 4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. 5 He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. 7 She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

Jesus' birth certainly wasn't under the best of circumstances for Mary and Joseph. But despite the rejection of family and friends when she was found to be pregnant, Mary was filled with joy at the coming of Jesus. She expressed that joy when she visited her cousin Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist.

Luke 1:46-49 NLT - 46 Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. 47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! 48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. 49 For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.

Like Mary, we have a choice in how we respond in difficult times. She was chosen by God to give birth to His son. Imagine the emotions that announcement carried with it! But despite the circumstance she not only trusted God's plan but rejoiced in it.

What challenges are you facing in your life that you cannot control? How do you see God's involvement in your situation? In what way might God be using this for your good, or for His glory?

Luke 2:13-17, 20 NLT - 13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others--the armies of heaven--praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." 15 When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16 They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. 17 After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ... 20 The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Shepherds were not highly regarded by society in their day. They were in fact outcasts. Yet God honored them when he chose to entrust them with the news of Jesus birth!

What does God's choice to honor the shepherds say to you about Him? Why is that a reason for us to rejoice?

Matthew 2:1-3 NIV - 1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.