

DECEMBER 17, 2023
THIRD SUNDAY
OF ADVENT



Faith in Jesus brings joy.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These passages are related to the Lectionary texts for this Sunday.

Sunday	John 1:6-8, 19-28	John's witness to the light
Monday	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11	Good news of deliverance
Tuesday	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	A call to rejoice
Wednesday	Luke 1:39-55	The Magnificat
Thursday	Psalms 30	Thanksgiving for illness recovery
Friday	James 1:2-4	Faith and wisdom
Saturday	Psalms 126	A people who dream
Sunday	Luke 1:26-38	The birth of Jesus foretold

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." Psalms 126:1-2 (NRSV)

PRAYERS AND BLESSING

A Prayer for the Week:

Almighty and living God, in you we find our hope, peace, and joy; during times of sadness and grief, give us faith to trust in your never-failing love through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Mealtime Prayer:

Dear God, with this food give us strength to witness to your love and goodness through Jesus Christ, the one who has come to give us joy. Amen.

A Blessing to Give:

May the God of peace give you joy at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)



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DECEMBER 17, 2023
HYMN OF THE WEEK 
Joy to the World



WEEKLY MILESTONES

Take a moment to tell or think about a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your life.

CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- Think or talk about something that has brought you joy.
- When have you experienced joy with others in the Christian community?

DEVOTIONS

Read: Psalm 126.

The psalm begins with a reference to Israel's return from exile. It was too good to be true, but it was true. It was like a dream, but it was real. Relying on that memory, the people once again seek God's intervention: "*Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses of the Negeb*" (v. 4). The *wadis* are dry riverbeds (watercourses) in the south of Israel (Negeb) that look barren until they are filled with flash floods. Then living waters overflow the riverbanks. Psalm 126 poetically seeks a similar and dramatic restoration for God's life-giving powers to restore God's people. We are encouraged by the history of God's favor that reaches us again and again, now through Jesus. Psalms like this one strengthen us, trusting that the God who came in Jesus will continue to intervene in our lives with grace. Verse six describes a life of faith. We know what it is to mourn, but our life is meant for joy. In the meantime, we go out with our task at hand, seeds to be sown in faith, ready for a harvest of joy.

Discuss: How does faith in Christ lead you to live a life of joy?

Pray: **God of our past and future, give us faith to dream dreams filled with faith, hope, and love that our daily lives may know the eternal joy of Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

SERVICE

Jesus calls us to serve our neighbor in love. Based on the Daily Bible Readings and theme for this week, how can you support and encourage someone who is mourning?

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

The scripture readings during Advent point to Jesus. This week we light three candles on the Advent wreath. The third candle is the candle of joy. Psalm 126 describes the Israelites' joy and thanksgiving to God upon their return to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon: "*Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.*" Think or talk about how God brings joy in good times and bad times.

Light the first candle of hope, the second candle of peace, and the third candle of joy and say: "***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.***" (John 1:5)



In addition to *Taking Faith Home*, celebrate milestones in your daily life as an effective faith formation tool. Go to: www.milestonesministry.org