

## **Joy to the world!**

**Definition - Joy- a very glad feeling, happiness, delight**

**Is that how you are feeling today or have the rigors of getting ready for Christmas taken it out of you?**

**Do you know how difficult it is to find a brass band c.d. or dvd to give as a present? Traipsing around every music shop in town; some that might just have a few c.d.'s stashed away in a corner and even some that you just go into in desperation hoping one might miraculously appear in front of you! "It's all downloadable now sir." What's a CD from the really young assistants! "What's a brass band?" from some of the others**

**But enough of my delights of Christmas shopping!**

**Joy should be something that is within us at all times regardless of our circumstances, and comes from knowing God and Christ as a reality in our lives. Easy to say but not so easy to live out in our lives however close to God we are. It took Paul the Apostle a lifetime to reach the point where he could say, "I have learned to be content in all circumstances"**

**But how can we have that joy in our lives.**

**For those who know something of the Old Testament in Leviticus 23, 1-2, God through Moses tells the Israelites about the appointed feasts that they are to observe in His name as Sacred assemblies. I think it's interesting to see that five of these feasts are celebrations and only two solemn. So often we think of, or at least I do with my limited knowledge, that Jewish festivals are solemn affairs with lots of quiet reflective times, not that that is bad but the reality is that they know how to have a good time in their celebrations and enjoy the joy of the Lord as they do it. God does not intend for Christianity to be only meditation and introspection important as that is – He encourages joy! He wants us to celebrate and be joyful and what better time than at Christmas when we celebrate the birth on earth of the Son of God, who came to give us fullness of life in God through His sacrificial death and resurrection. A baby born to change the course of history and the world and most importantly the hearts and minds of people. To bring them a hope and a promise of life eternal with their heavenly Father.**

**Serious reflection and confession of sin are indeed essential elements of the Christian life but these should be balanced by celebrating who God is and what He has done for His people.**

**King David found the secret of joy. In Psalm 16: 8-9 he tells us: “I am always thinking of the Lord; and because He is so near, I never need to stumble or to fall. Heart, body and soul are filled with joy.”**

**That is not to say David’s life suddenly became trouble free, quite the reverse as we read in the stories of the Old Testament. But true joy is far deeper than happiness; we can feel joy in spite of our deepest troubles. Happiness is temporary because it is based on external circumstances to achieve it. Joy is lasting because it is based on God’s presence within us. As David, and we, contemplate His daily presence we will find contentment. As He reveals, and we understand the future He has for us, we will experience joy. Not a joy as the world knows it but a deep inner joy that doesn’t rely on the circumstances around us but on a sure and certain knowledge that God and Christ are our ultimate Saviour and that whatever happens in this world we can look to the heavens knowing that they will never leave us or forsake us and that ultimately we will be with them in heaven in the glorious places and that that is our ultimate joy. Yes we need to live our lives for God on earth and as the great commission tells us “make disciples of all nations” but our eyes should be on the heavenly places where as Paul tells us in Philippians 3: 14 “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” As we do that more and more then having God’s joy in our lives in all circumstances becomes easier.**

**God knew when He raised Jesus from the dead and He returned to Heaven that by ourselves we would stumble and fall so He sent the comforter, the Holy Spirit to help and guide us. Again as we allow him to do that, and it’s not always easy, we receive the fruits of the spirit as he works with us to make us more Christlike.**

**Some of those fruits are listed in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. As we allow the Spirit to work within us and to change us, it will make it easier to carry out to two great commands that Jesus gave us: to love God and to love our neighbours.**

**In Philippians 4:4 Paul, who at this point is chained up in prison, in the Living Bible translation tells the Philippian church to “ Always be full of joy in the Lord;” and to make sure they did not misunderstand him he repeated it; “ I say again, rejoice!”**

**Strange you may think for a man in his circumstances to exhort joy, but Paul’s attitude taught the Philippian church and us an important lesson. Our inner attitudes do not have to reflect our outward circumstances. Paul was full of joy because he knew that no matter what happened to him, Jesus Christ was with him. It’s easy to get discouraged about unpleasant circumstances or to take unimportant events too seriously. We need to look at life from Christ’s perspective not the worlds’.**

**Ultimate joy comes from Christ dwelling within us. Christ is near and at His Second Coming we will fully realise this ultimate joy.**

**To summarise: Christian joy:  
Grows out of real worship;  
Comes from being in God's presence;  
Comes from the working of the Holy Spirit within us  
And allows us to be joyful in spite of our circumstances.**

**Philippians 1:3-6**

**"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it in to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."**

**As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ in that lowly stable in Bethlehem let's try and realise the enormity of the task before Him, that it wasn't always easy and that He suffered on our behalf in order to restore our relationship with God the Father, but through it all He had the joy of the Lord in His heart even in the darkest moments. As Psalm 23:4 tells us " Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff they comfort me" and verse 6 of the same psalm says, " Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." To goodness and love we can add joy in the knowledge of God's unfailing love for us and the assurance of our place in heaven one day.**

**Let's celebrate Jesus birth knowing that He will never leave us or forsake us and that we can have God's joy in our hearts in all circumstances because our ultimate destination is heaven!**