

I Was Glad When...

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I was glad when...

I'm gonna ask you to think about a time when you were glad. And I'm gonna ask you to shout some of those times out, as you are comfortable, and give us a glimpse of what makes the people of God glad in this congregation. I'll go first.

I was glad when... *I smelled chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven.*

I was glad when...

Voices from the congregation: *...my kids were born.*

I was glad when...

Voices from the congregation: *...forty people actually fit in our house for Thanksgiving.*

I was glad when...

Voices from the congregation: *...I got to spend the day with my granddaughter and great grandchildren.*

I was glad when...

Voices from the congregation: *...my Dad came home with two extra lightsabers.*

I was glad when...

Voices from the congregation: *...we got to see the squirrels playing in the trees in our backyard.*

There is a lot that makes us glad, isn't there? This season is about *hope*, and hope can make us glad. That hope was spoken of in our Psalm this morning. Psalm 122 opens with "I was glad when they said to me, let us go up to the house of the Lord." That gladness – that rejoicing – comes in because the house of the Lord is where God is. The house of the Lord is where Hope is. The house of the Lord – the Temple – is where heaven and earth come together.

When I was a kid, this season was when heaven and earth came together under the Christmas tree. Or where the magic of Christmas came and could be seen at the house down the street from where I lived. It was that one house in a three-block radius that went overboard on every holiday. Christmas was the pinnacle of their decorative over-achievements. I was glad when I could look down the street and see the glow from that one house in the middle of the night. They had a sleigh and reindeer on the roof. They had elves working in Santa's workshop. They had Frosty the snowman in the front yard. They had all kinds of lights, and candy-canes along the walkway. They had *animatronics*; Santa and Mrs. Clause in the front window waving! And, of course, they had the nativity scene in there in all the Christmas light show that was their front yard.

I was glad when this season came about. I was glad when I learned what this season was truly about. I was glad when they said, “Let’s go to Christmas Eve service and sing a lullaby to the newborn baby Jesus.” I was glad when I could see all of these signs of Christmas coming about.

As we’re going through this Advent, we’re following the song, *Do You Hear What I Hear?* We heard the first verse – we sang the first verse – of that carol this morning in response to the lighting of our first Advent candle. The opening lyric is, “Do you see what I see?”

Do you see the Christmas trees going up in the stores in September? It’s a little early... but yeah. Do you see the lights shining? Do you see the reindeer decorations being put on top of houses (and God bless the people who climb up on top of their homes to do that)? Do you see all the signs of Christmas all around you?

But then there’s a deeper question that goes with, ‘do you see?’ The passage from Romans that was read this morning kind of touches on this question of, ‘do you see’. Actually, both the scriptures do. It’s not really a Christmas message we get from both Paul’s letter to the Romans and the Gospel according to Matthew this morning. It’s more of an end-times message. Romans is telling us, ‘Give up all of these fun-loving, indiscrete, self-gratifying and self-abusive ways of living your life.’ Things like debauchery and violence and – Paul blatantly says – sexual immorality and all desires of the flesh.

Give it all up... Cause you need to be ready, says Matthew. You need to be ready cause if they’d known the flood was coming, in Noah’s day, they might have been able to save themselves. They didn’t and many lives were lost while Noah and his family, and the animals two by two, were saved in the arc. Jesus also warns a bit about what some interpret as the rapture. There will be two men working in the field and suddenly there will be one. There will be two women grinding grain and suddenly there will be one. It’ll happen like a thief coming in the night.

‘Do you see’ is a deeper question in this day, given the scriptures we have this morning. ‘Do you see’ is a question about priority. The song is cute and charming in its lyrics. “The night wind says to the little lamb, ‘Do you see...?’” Do you see the star in the sky? A sign that something holy and divine is about to happen, or more accurately, has happened. A lot of times we like to put this star up at the very beginning of Advent. In scripture, though, the star doesn’t appear until the Christ-child is born. The Magi seeing the star then take two years to arrive at, not a manger scene, but a home, where the family of Joseph and Mary and the toddler Jesus was living.

Do you see the signs around you, not of Christmas coming? Do you see the signs around you of the world needing Christ? See, the question in the scriptures is about reprioritizing.

There is something hopeful in Advent. There is something new happening in Advent. There is something coming that we need to be ready for. It takes something deeper than asking your kids, or your grandkids, or your great grandkids about their Christmas lists. ‘Do you see what I see?’ goes beyond the lists, goes beyond the sales, goes beyond the lights and garland and tinsel. The question goes beyond finding the perfect gift with the perfect wrapping, beyond getting the

lights up the right way, beyond making sure the banners are straight. The question goes to, Do you see what Christ sees? Do you see the people for whom a Blue Christmas Service, where you remember those who have been lost and acknowledge the pain of the season, is more meaningful than our traditional celebrations of joy and cheer? Do you see the people who can't afford to give their families the Christmas they want to give them, and the pain, the sense of failure, and the sense of inability that can bring? Do you see the people whose Christmas will be spent in a hospital, or overseas, away from family? Do you see the people who don't have a family to spend Christmas with? Do you see the people who don't have homes to decorate with tree and tinsel? Do you see the pain, the longing... do you see what Christ sees in this season?

If the answer is yes, then there is hope. If the answer is, 'I do see them and I want to do something about it,' then there is hope. If the answer is, 'I see the hungry and I want to bring them food,' then there is hope. And where there is hope, then we can say, 'I was glad when the Spirit spoke to me this Christmas.'

I was glad when I was able to bring pajamas of all sizes and donate them to the PJ Drive at my church. I was glad when HOPE Food Pantry was able to help so many families in this season, just like they do every single week. I was glad when we were at charge conference and we talked about all the goals we have for the year and how we can minister and be a more fulfilling and a more engaged congregation in this community here in Oregon City. I was glad when I heard the scripture that says, 'be prepared,' because the Spirit spoke to me and my heart said, 'Yes, let us prepare. Let us do all God tells us to do.'

Let us come into this season, not just expecting the Christ-child, but preparing for the Christ-child. Let us come into this season of hope, bringing hope. Let us come into this Advent as the people of God showing God's love, not just in carols sung of the Christ-child, but in action lived because Christ has risen. Cause the hope we have in Christmas is not just the hope of a baby born in a manger. It's the hope of that baby living his life, teaching, preaching, showing us what love is and what it looks like, bringing us salvation through a sacrifice, and bringing us new life through a resurrection. This story we live in the next few weeks is just the beginning.

Let us go through this Advent seeing what Christ sees. Let us go through this Advent loving as Christ loved. Let us go through this Advent listening for that news and that Spirit where we can say, 'I was glad when the Spirit told me to reach out in love.'

In Jesus' name. Amen.