

Interactive lesson



picture from personal creation

One of the things that I and many other people love about Christmastime is the music. What is your favorite Christmas carol? Why? <Let them respond>

Why do you think people like Christmas music in general? <Let them respond>

Have you ever gone Christmas caroling?
<Let them respond>

What makes Christmas caroling special?
<Let them respond>

In what other ways do we share joy at Christmastime?
<Let them respond>

When God came to walk among us, it was - and still is - a cause for great joy, great celebration. Let us be reminded every time that we hear song, to share that joy with others in whatever way presents itself to us.

Gospel lesson

We continue in Luke this week with John the Baptist telling the crowds how to prepare for the coming of Jesus.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/john-baptist/>

Luke 3:7-18

(NRSV)

⁷ John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

⁸ Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

⁹ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?"

¹¹ In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?"

¹³ He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you."

¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,

¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart" UMH #160>

Message: The Joy of Home



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-home-for-christmas/third-sunday-of-advent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/third-sunday-of-advent-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Celebrated Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may embody the joy of being in your love.
Amen.

We continue our Advent worship series with “The Joy
of Home.”



picture from

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In summary:

“Week three is the time to throw the parties! This is the joy Sunday, the celebration of the gift that comes and the gift we are to and with one another.

Let there be shouts of praise and hope. Let there be laughter and joy.”

I like that picture of a Grandma greeting her grandson, with Christmas lights brightening up the scene. It makes me think of happy reunions with those I love.

Last week I took communion to shut ins. As one of those visits, I stopped by Patti Lamandia’s home on Monday. She had just had some physical therapy, so I went into that room to serve her.

She was kind of tired, and you could see out the



picture from personal photo

window that it was a gray, dreary day weatherwise. There was no music playing and the kids were at school, so the house was rather quiet, and that particular room of their house had not been decorated for Christmas.

For last week’s sermon I had talked about the Fear of Home, that things might not go the way you wanted for family gatherings. In finishing communion in that somber setting, with Patti’s physical situation

definitely not what she would have looked forward to a few years ago, I thought there ought to be something to help cheer her up, to have hope for a better Christmas than it felt to me in that moment.

So many things make it hard for us to celebrate belonging to God as we should.

- † We get so used to the many blessings we do have, that we take them for granted.
- † We choose to focus on other things - e.g., jobs, hobbies, entertainment - and forget to celebrate the people we love and our awesome God.
- † We may be overwhelmed by problems crashing in on us, disrupting our lives - e.g., bills, work issues, health concerns, accidents - such that we cannot think about celebrating anything because all of our energy is consumed with trying to get back to normal.

That kind of thing happened back in biblical times too.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/john-baptist/>

- † In Zephaniah, we hear about enemies, disaster, oppressors, and shame that they have, for the Lord to resolve.
- † John the Baptist had to tell people to stop sinning. The Hebrews coming to be baptized by him did not understand how to act as part of God's household, how to treat one another, or how to recognize the Messiah.
- † Paul felt it necessary to tell the Philippians not to worry, to remind them to rejoice.

And yet, in the midst of their troubles and worry, the Good News was proclaimed.

- † Zephaniah points out that “[God] is in your midst...he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”
- † John the Baptist told people about imminent fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah, coming to gather God's people closer to the Lord.
- † Paul reminded the people that there was cause to rejoice, that because of Jesus, they could trust in God to guard their hearts and minds with His peace.

We can praise too, because God is in our midst, showering us with love and blessings.



picture from personal photo

Christmas carols generally put me in a good mood, so after giving Patti Lamandia communion, I made a comment about Christmas music and how it would be nice to hear some playing. They did not have their Christmas CDs handy, so I asked Patti if she would like for us to sing some Christmas carols.

Patti indicated her favorite carol is “Away in a Manger,” so we started with that. Her eyes lit up and although I could not hear her voice, I could see her mouthing the words along with Dawn and me, singing along as best she could.

We sang a few more carols, and Patti’s spirits seemed to lift even more as we sang. It made me so happy to see her engaged that way that I wanted to spend all afternoon there singing, but I had to be on my way.

The grace of that time got me to thinking that not only can we share the love of God more, we need to. We need to invite others to the great party, the celebration that is life in Christ.

Tell someone of the glory of God and how you have been blessed – sing His praises for all to hear!

- † Perhaps that means literally singing – going to someone’s house and caroling for them.
- † Perhaps it means simply showing in a meaningful way that you love someone – reaching out with a phone call or card, or taking care of something for them that they struggle to do for themselves.
- † And maybe it means doing these things beyond just the Christmas season, living every month, every year, **our entire lives in joyous celebration of God** in our midst.

We have all been very blessed, evidenced by our being able to be here today. Share the gift of God’s blessings, the joyous love of Christ, and the peace of the Holy Spirit with all whom you encounter – in all times and all places, just as God is with us in all times and all places.

<Confession and Pardon

BOW #478, modified>

Let us pray:

**Holy and awesome God, we stand in your presence
filled with regret for our many sins and failings.
Though there is greatness in us, and a deep longing
for goodness, we have often denied our better
selves and refused to hear your voice calling us to
rise to the full height of our humanity.
For there is weakness in us, as well as strength.**

At times we choose to walk in darkness, our vision obscured.

We do not care to look within, and we are unwilling to look beyond at those who need our help.

O God, we are too weak to walk unaided.

Be with us as a strong and wise friend, and teach us to walk by the light of your truth.

Amen.

The Lord God is merciful and gracious, endlessly patient, loving, and true, showing mercy to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Glory to God. Amen.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God who gives all gifts, in this season, we focus so much on giving gifts to one another.

Help us, we pray, to remember what John the Baptist tells us is on your wish list:

that we might bear fruit worthy of the repentance that is the very heart of this season: fruit of compassion, fruit of sharing, fruit by denying

ourselves so that others who have little will have enough.

In response to you, we give that our fruit might please you.

- Lord, please help {these whom we lift up} with healing touch and comfort:
 - **Family of Joey Gilmore** - passed away Dec 7
 - **Pat & Chuck Hathaway** - Pat still in hosp
 - **Bill Tei** - covid & back issues after fall
 - **Family of 14 yom Cincinnatus student** - suicide
 - -
 - -
 - -
- Thanks for
 - -
 - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we pray in as You taught us to pray:
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "Joy to the World" UMH #246>

<Benediction>



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As you gather with loved ones this Christmas season,
give your fears to God,
celebrate the joy of your relationships, and
cherish blessings (new and rediscovered).
Welcome Christ into your home,
rest in the grace of the Holy Spirit, and
let the light of God's love shine through you.
Amen.