**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, December 16, 2018, 3rd Sunday of Advent**

**Lighting the Candle of Joy**

We light the candle of Joy as a sign of the coming light of Christ.

**In Christ there is life and light for all people.**

Now lift up your heads and rejoice: your redeemer is drawing near.

**Prepare the way of the Holy One! All flesh will see the salvation of God.**

Christ has come to baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth!**

**Prayer of the Day**

God of our joy! We are thankful to you for coming with news of your reign!

And we thank you for entering our lives fully human, fully divine.

Grant that our worship be in united in Spirit and Truth,

Let our songs be our prayers of praise, heralds of your kingdom.

Mighty God, Prince of Peace.

Amen.

**Call to Confession**

Slow down. And remember what the Christmas Season is about. Not chasing happiness but rest in the joy and knowledge of God’s goodness. Together and then in silence, let us pray this prayer of confession…

**Prayer of Confession**

**Lord, the angel came to Mary and Joseph to proclaim news of great Joy! So we prepare with making lists, double checking them, complaining of how busy and stressed out this season makes us. We worry whether things are going to be perfect this holiday. Mary did what we have not done well – magnify the Lord, proclaim His salvation to the nations. Help us to set aside our anxieties, and take up the call to magnify God’s mighty power over our lives. Remind us again and again what this season is about – joy.** *~silence~* **Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, Believe the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Zephaniah 3:14-20**

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;

shout, O Israel!

**Rejoice and exult with all your heart,**

**O daughter Jerusalem!**

The LORD has taken away the judgments against you,

he has turned away your enemies.

**The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;**

**you shall fear disaster no more.**

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Do not fear, O Zion;

do not let your hands grow weak.

**The LORD, your God, is in your midst,**

**a warrior who gives victory;**

he will rejoice over you with gladness,

he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing

as on a day of festival.

**I will remove disaster from you,**

**so that you will not bear reproach for it.**

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time.

And I will save the lame

and gather the outcast,

and I will change their shame into praise

and renown in all the earth.

**At that time I will bring you home,**

**at the time when I gather you;**

for I will make you renowned and praised

among all the peoples of the earth,

when I restore your fortunes

before your eyes, says the LORD.

**Prayers of the People**

Let us pray to God saying:  
God of Wisdom, **draw near to us**

Ever-present God,  
we look around the world and we see places where people cry out to you:  
in places torn by the ravages of war,  
in countries demolished by natural disasters,  
in areas of rural Kentucky where there are no jobs,  
in families across our state who have been devastated by opioid addiction.  
Help us bear your light into the places in the world that need illumination and healing.  
God of Wisdom, **draw near to us.**

Gracious God,  
give us a gentleness born of wisdom  
that we might go out into the world and serve as your ambassadors.  
In order to do that, bless us with the wisdom needed to do so –  
a wisdom that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield,  
full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.  
God of Wisdom, **draw near to us.**

God of all mercy and grace,  
give us the courage to seek you out,  
to search our hearts for your truth,  
and to be guided by the stories of scripture.  
Since our hearts do not rest until they rest in you,  
lead us to the pastures of your protection,  
that we might be faithful members of your flock.  
God of Wisdom, **draw near to us.**

Healing God,  
we pray for those among us this day who need your love:  
for those who struggle with depression’s grip,  
for those who journey with physical disabilities,  
for those who are lonely,  
for those who are hopeless,  
for those who are addicted,  
for those who are angry and bitter,  
for those who are broken and battered,  
and for those we lift up to you in silence this day…  
God of Wisdom, **draw near to us.**

Giver of Hope and Truth,  
hear us today as we pray the prayer you taught us to pray, saying: **Our Father…**

**Time Out for Teaching:** **Joy to the World**

This day is traditionally referred to as “Mary’s Day” in Advent, signified by the pink candle…

**Philippians 4:4-7**

4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Luke 3:7-18**

7John 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? 8Bear 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. 9Even 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."

10And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" 11In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." 12Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" 13He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." 14Soldiers 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."

15As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16John 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. 17His 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."

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

**Sermon: “More Powerful than Water”**

Joy and happiness are not exactly the same thing. In the words of theologian Frederick Buechner, “Happiness turns up more or less where you’d expect… Joy is as notoriously unpredictable as the one who bequeaths it.” Certain things make us happy but they aren’t necessarily the stuff of joy. As Buechner says, joy is unpredictable. We can be surprised by it, the surge that we feel in our hearts at certain TV commercials or movies, the smell or remembrance of a cookie our grandmother made. Joy is a gift from God, a little bit of Heaven breaking in and all we can say is “thank you” and maybe a little “woo hoo!”

Near the end of the movie, Forrest Gump, when Jenny is sick in bed, she asks Forrest if he was afraid while he was fighting in Vietnam. Here is what he said:

“Yes. Well, I, I don't know. Sometimes it would stop raining long enough for the stars to come out. And then it was nice. It was like just before the sun goes to bed down on the bayou there was over a million sparkles on the water. Like that mountain lake. It was so clear, Jenny. It looks like there were two skies, one on top of the other. And then in the desert, when the sun comes up, I couldn't tell where heavens stopped and the earth began. It was so beautiful.

Forrest’s answer to being afraid was his realization that he was in the presence of beauty. He took time to look at the beauty of his surroundings, even when he was in the middle of war, and it was difficult to tell where the heavens stopped and the earth began.

And the look on his face, so eloquently played by Tom Hanks, was beatific, that is, overwhelmed beauty and it seems to me, translated to a deep joy that goes beyond words. We have all had moments which cause us to gape open-mouthed at goodness and beauty which comfort us, even if we know we are in the midst of warfare, political upheaval, a family drama, or even our stress about our plans for Holiday perfection. Even though Forrest Gump is a fictional tale, it is also profoundly true, reminding us that even when things are difficult, can still find something about which they can say, “thank you!” or even perhaps, “woo hoo!”

One of the mistakes we can make during this time of waiting for the birth of Christ, is to confuse happiness with joy. Happiness is often where we usually find it. For me it usually involves Barbecue Ribs or a good cup of coffee. Joy is greater, that moment Forrest described when he couldn’t tell where heaven ends and earth begins. Or in our case, Joy is knowing that heaven and earth meet in the birth of Jesus Christ. Because we need his help so. Our comfort and joy is the assurance in his birth that God is with us and for us, that we belong to God forever and that we are truly loved.

John the Baptist tells his audience that the Messiah’s coming is imminent. And they have to get ready, beginning with a life of repentance. The baptism is merely a sign of their joyful response that Heaven is coming. The greater joy is knowing that the one coming is more powerful than he. More powerful than even the water he washes them with. The one who is coming shall reign forever and ever. And it begins with us giving of ourselves. Notice the kind of gift giving that John tells them to do. He doesn’t mention the usual things that simply make a person happy. They are true gifts of sharing what one has and practicing truthful ways of life. Share with your neighbors – if you have two coats, give one away. And, whatever you do for a living, do it fairly – using Soldiers, Tax Collectors as examples.

Our giving and living tells of our joy and knowledge that Heaven and Earth meet in the birth of our savior. Not because we are afraid of him, but because he is our sole comfort, the source of beauty and wisdom, especially when we are surrounded by the worst. Pause and look for the beauty of lights, the kindness of your neighbors, and realize that every little bit of that is a sign that Heaven and Earth have met. Amen.