

Joy

Advent



Matthew 2:10-11

“When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”

The third week is the time when the people who started the modern Advent Candle tradition lit the next two and used them to represent the coming of Christ as a baby. The first two weeks were focused on the second coming of Christ as predicted in the Old Testament also.

The third candle is usually referred to as the candle of Joy or Peace. It is usually pink to show joy as opposed to the purple, but there are often variances in color throughout the Advent season. Traditionally we think of red and green as Christmas colors, but

there are many people who now use blue or even silver and gold to trim their homes and trees.

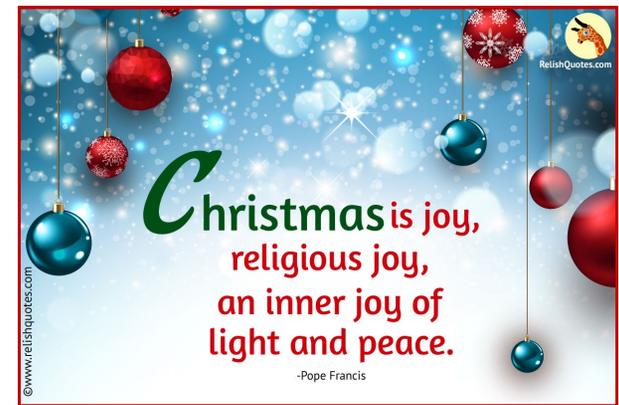
The Bible tells us the Magi were overjoyed. We don't know how far they traveled, but they were from another country and so it could have been quite a distance to set out to follow a star and think you were going to see a new King to give treasures and worship. Did they think it would be a baby?

This candle is sometimes called “The Shepherd’s Candle.” The shepherds were not very high in society, but they were chosen by God to have an angel appear to them.

“Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’” Luke 2:10-12

How often do we stop to realize that the angel told them the baby was being born for them, not some high society person, not nobility, not the rich, but the poor, lowly shepherds. Christ’s birth was told to strangers and the poor. He came for us.

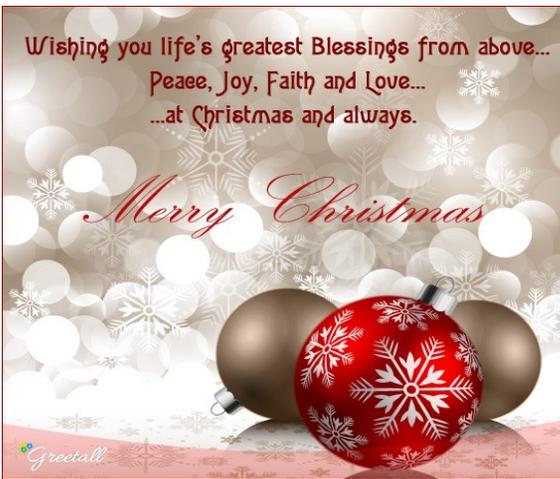
I don't know about you, but this brings me joy today. I know that I have a God who loves me. I may not be good looking, or rich, or high in society, but he loves me just as much as he loves them. He cares for me each day and that gives me great joy and security that someday, I will get to see him face to face. I will



See the shepherds and the Magi, and all who have accepted him as their personal Savior regardless of their social status, nationality, skin color, or physical appearance on this earth. What a blessing.

As each generation goes through history, I assume that we all think at some time that the world is really in bad shape, far worse than it has ever been before! Today, we worry about politics, poverty, and violence. A little reading of the Bible tells us that this is nothing new. The Old Testament is full of murders beginning with the first family. How can we possibly have joy without our Savior? The Magi and the shepherds were seeking joy, and they found it. It is ours today also.

One of my favorite Christmas songs is “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow first wrote it as a poem. It was later set to music by John Baptiste Calkin. So often a good poem tells a story in just a few words. Longfellow and his wife had six children and one day her dress caught on fire and as much as he tried to save her, he could not and she died from severe burns the next day. Then at age 18 his oldest son left home one day and went to fight with President Lincoln in the Civil War.



The son contracted what was then called "camp fever" probably typhoid or typhomalarial fever and was sent home. As soon as he was able, he returned to battle only to be wounded quite severely. Longfellow and another son went to Virginia. A distraught Longfellow wrote a poem on Christmas day in 1863 that captured his feelings and his ultimate joy. Bells were ringing, but he wasn't feeling joy. As he fought his way through the despair of his losses and questioning, he ultimately wrote that he knew God lived and saw an optimistic view through the violence and injustices of life that God is alive and righteousness shall prevail.

Two stanzas in the center are often omitted that tell details of the Civil War battle. So often we also fight this battle, maybe not as severely as Longfellow, but we worry and see so much injustice and wonder how we can ever see through it, but the shepherds did, the Magi did, and we can too. We can say with Longfellow "God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; the wrong shall fail. The Right prevail, With peace on earth, good will to men."

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

*"I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
and wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

*"And thought how, as the day had
come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

*"Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

*"And in despair I bowed my head;
'There is no peace on earth,' I said;
'For hate is strong, And mocks the
song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!'"*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail, The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to
men.'"*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, sometimes we don't understand why you don't do things our way. Sometimes we see so much injustice and we know that you can work miracles. We believe but we worry instead of putting things in your hands. Strengthen our faith each day and let us show that we live and trust in you and your salvation. Amen.

1. Can you stop for a minute and try to imagine the joy and many, many quiet smiles that the Magi and the shepherds must have had?
2. Can you imagine being given the message of God's salvation to spread to the world? Have you been?
3. Can we see "Peace on Earth?"
4. How can we help to bring "Peace on Earth?"
5. How can we help to bring JOY and PEACE to someone today?

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