

Singing in the Dark (published in the Faith and Reason section of the The Daily Item, 12/20/2025)

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This Advent, I've been wrestling with a question: What difference do the tenets of Advent: hope, peace, joy, and love actually make in our lives and in our communities? These words are beautiful, but are they powerful?

Last week, as I was preparing to preach on joy, I heard a story that answered my question.

A woman, I will name her Elizabeth for the purposes of this article, stood before us in community and shared the story of her son, John. During her first trimester, Liz and her husband learned that their baby had a life-threatening birth defect. He would not survive long after birth. They were given options, but they made a choice: they would carry John to term, celebrate every moment of his life, and trust God with the outcome.

During the pregnancy, they read to John. They sang to him. They took family photos and went on adventures, creating memories they would carry forever. When it came time for delivery, John was born by C-section to ensure the safest, least stressful arrival possible.

For eight precious hours, they held him. They called him by name. They showered him with the love of parents and family. They captured pictures, read to him, sang to him, prayed with him, and simply spent time with him. And then, softly and quietly, John went to sleep in their arms.

As Liz shared her story, tears streamed down the cheeks of everyone gathered. But here's what struck me most: Liz said that even in the midst of fear, tears, and devastation, God's joy never left. The loss was indescribable, but the God given joy continued to sustain her.

That, for me underscored what Advent joy really is.

It's not the fragile, glass-ornament kind of joy that shatters when life gets hard. It's the deep, unshakeable joy that comes from knowing God is with us—no matter what.

This is the joy Mary sang about in Luke 1. Mary, a young woman facing disgrace, potential death by stoning, and certain ostracism, responded to the angel's news by breaking into song. She praised God in the very moment that could have destroyed her. She sang the Magnificat—a revolutionary hymn about God lifting up the humble, filling the hungry, and keeping God's promises.

Mary's joy wasn't based on her circumstances being perfect. It was based on God's character being unchanging.

Elizabeth's joy wasn't based on John's surviving, in fact that was most devastating. However, knowing God's presence even in the midst of this devastation was real, it gave her and her husband deep abiding joy.

This is the joy that builds community. Not the shallow happiness that depends on everything going our way, but the deep, abiding joy rooted in God's love for us.

And the same is true for hope, peace, and love. These aren't fleeting emotions or sentimental wishes. They are tenets—foundational truths—given to us by God through the gift of Christ.

Christmas is the ultimate reminder that these gifts are real and accessible. Christ was born to show us that hope, peace, joy, and love abide deep within us, no matter what is happening in the world around us. We can anchor ourselves in these truths, and when we do, something remarkable happens: others recognize it in us, and we begin to connect and build community together.

Much like Liz, whose strength in one of the darkest hours of life encouraged a room full of people, we become witnesses to the sustaining power of God's presence. Her unshakeable joy testified that God's joy in dark moments is real and available to all of us. Christ's birth showed us this very fact.

A community built on authentic hope, peace, joy, and love—the kind born in a manger more than 2,000 years ago—is a community with a foundation strong enough to weather any storm. It's a community that can journey together, serve together, grow together, and love together. It's a community seeking to follow Christ's teaching to love one another, no matter what.

My hope for you this Advent and Christmas season is that you discover this deep, abiding peace, hope, love, and joy. Not the kind the world offers—temporary, conditional, fragile—but the kind God offers: eternal, unconditional, unshakeable.

May love come down at Christmas for you and all those around you. Love rooted in deep, abiding hope, peace, and joy. Love that builds the kind of community we all long for—the kind that feels like home.

Because that's what Christmas is: God coming home to us, so we can finally come home to God and to each other.

Merry Christmas.