



**Thought for the Week for the Second Sunday of Advent**  
**5<sup>th</sup> December 2021**  
**by Elisabeth Sweeney**

## **The Joy of Christmas**

Joy is a little word with a big bang!

An explosive emotional eruption is what Joy indeed is or, in other words, elation at something which has happened or we excitedly anticipate happening. During the Advent season it is the expectation of that which the angels announced to the shepherds as “good news for you which will bring great joy to all the people.” (Luke 2:10 GNB) This is the cause of Christians’ joy.

We prepare ourselves during Advent to receive this gift of Good News which we in the West mark annually towards the end of December. For some people, albeit these days if they preface it with ‘Christmas is only for the children’, this joy is often referred to as ‘the magic of Christmas’. Although the angels would disagree completely with Christmas as being for children only, I can see what is meant. Many adults have lost the curiosity and excitement that the surprise element of Christmas presents brings; whilst children get caught up in what is the lengthy count down of how many sleeps left to the big day, many adults miss out on the joyful news and long for the post-Christmas quiet. But maybe we should be learning from the children for whom the build-up to Christmas Day is how we should be viewing Advent – a time of uncontainable joy. Sadly, we know that for many children, of course, anticipation about what will be under the Christmas tree will not be their experience of December at all. And perhaps it is beyond the piles of presents and to the poverty of marginalised folk, like the shepherds, that we should really be looking for understanding what the essence of Christmas cheer is all about. The ‘good news of great joy’ which the angels announced was for ‘all the people’ so it has to do with much more than the economic fortunes your family or the country you are born into brings.

Joy is not always quantifiable but you know when you experience it because it is an emotion that is actually quite rare. I want to share something that happened to me recently as I joined a joint coffee morning with some of my own congregational church folk and members of the local Catholic church. As I walked up to join the coffee morning, half an hour after it had started, what I heard through the open windows was palpable joy. This shared coffee morning was a new post-Covid initiative for us to spend time in each other’s church settings getting to know each other as fellow Christians. The volume of noise from animated conversations was so lovely to hear and as we moved across the road from our Sunday school building to show our Catholic friends our humble 17<sup>th</sup> century chapel, the joie de vivre was electric. We seemed to be experiencing what the psalmist of 133 wrote about “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity”. There was more to this feeling than just having a good time, there was an excitement in the air, and I think it was Joy.



Source: <https://gregsloop.com/2020/12/13/joy-in-the-incarnation/>

I am sure the angels as they delivered that message of good news to the shepherds were as ecstatic as the little children soon will be on Christmas Eve – why? Because they were witnesses to the anticipation of the God Head whose gifting would bring hope of restoration and salvation for the whole of creation.

Jesus, our Christmas Gift, put it like this in his farming parable of the lost sheep: “Likewise, there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous ones who have not strayed away” (Luke 15:7). Therein lies the reason which compels us to joyfully preach the gospel of Good News this Christmas time to all people.