

## Opener: Snow Days and Staying Love

Last week, the snow won.

At least it won the parking lot and the roads.

We stayed home. We brewed coffee. Some of us shoveled snow, and some of us stayed in our pajamas and didn't feel bad about it at all.

But here's what didn't stop: Advent.

God's love did not take a snow day.

Christ's joy did not pause because Marion's roads iced over. [Rom 8:38–39; Heb 13:8]

We use the word *love* all the time:

“I love coffee.” “I love my kids.” “I love Christmas.” “I love God.” Same word, with wildly different meanings.

In Scripture, love is not primarily a feeling word; it is a movement word. You see, Love moves forward, and Love stays, but most importantly, Love shows up.

John tells us, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”—that's Love with an address (John 1:14). That's Love moving into the neighborhood and refusing to leave.<sup>1</sup>

And when Love moves in, something else happens... Joy breaks out. Not shallow cheer or seasonal sentiment, but deep, surprising “good news of great joy” that reaches all the way out to the edges of... Everything (Luke 2:10–11).<sup>2</sup>

So on this “double-candle” Sunday, we put Love and Joy together, not because we're behind, but because we're telling the truth: when Love comes to stay, Joy can't help but sing.<sup>3</sup>

**Stand up and join us as we sing “Joy to the World.”**

## Introduction: Love Came to Stay

John says that the “true light that gives light to everyone” was coming into the world and that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:9, 14). If you listen closely, that sounds less like philosophy and more like a moving truck.

Think about it: God does not send us an idea or a distant instruction manual... **He comes himself. He takes on skin and bone.**

We have long said, “Christ has come to teach his people himself.”<sup>4</sup> Right? The same Christ who spoke galaxies into being (John 1) and He doesn't just visit; He “made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

<sup>1</sup> N. T. Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–10* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Luke 1–24*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Carole Dale Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, rev. ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1998); Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (Glenside, PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002).

This is crucial for how we understand love.

Love doesn't just send thoughts and prayers from a distance.

Love comes close and stays in the mess.

Love walks into ordinary houses, into complicated family systems, into small-town churches that miss a Sunday because of snow.<sup>5</sup>

For us, holiness is not a fragile perfection that cracks if life gets messy. It is the steady, faithful presence of Christ among us and in us, reshaping our desires, our habits, and our community.<sup>6</sup>

Thomas Kelly called this living from the “Divine Center.”<sup>7</sup> A life quietly anchored in the One who has moved in and will not move out. God’s love is not a seasonal mood; it is a dwelling place.

So, before we talk about joy, we have to let this sink in: in Christ, Love has come to stay (John 1:14; Rom 8:38–39).

- Not, “Love will be here if you get your act together.”
- Not, “Love stops by on Christmas Eve and then disappears.”

Love has moved in, and Love stays through snow days... The bad days... And lonely days.

Something amazing that Love gives us is faith. Faith is not mostly trying harder; faith is receiving the One who has come.<sup>8</sup> As we’ve said before, faith receives Christ and issues in love’s obedience. And when Love moves in, obedience becomes the shape Love takes in our daily lives (John 14:21).

## Joy Broke In

Apostle John shows us that Love moving in... Well, the physician and historian Luke shows us what happens next... Joy bursts out. And where does God stage the announcement?

- Not at the palace.
- Not at the Temple.

Joy arrives in a field, on the night shift, with a people who probably smelled like sheep and smoke.<sup>9</sup> “There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified” (Luke 2:8-9).

We always imagine this as a cozy scene, but Luke says those people were terrified. Isn’t it odd that when heaven’s light hits earth’s darkness, our first reaction is usually fear

<sup>5</sup> Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> John Wesley, *The Standard Sermons of John Wesley*, ed. Kenneth C. Kinghorn, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941).

<sup>8</sup> Paul N. Anderson, *Following Jesus: The Heart of Faith and Practice* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Cyndi Parker, *Encountering Jesus in the Real World of the Gospels* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2020).

(Exod 3:6; Isa 6:5). And the angel says, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10).

**Notice the order: “Do not be afraid; good news; great joy; for all the people.”**

Joy is not denial of fear; joy is what happens when fear hears good news and begins to loosen its grip (Phil 4:4–7).<sup>10</sup>

The good news is not:

- “Try harder, shepherds.”

It is not,

- “You’re doing fine just as you are.”

The good news is a person:

“*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord*” (Luke 2:11).

Joy, in the New Testament, is not shallow cheerfulness; it is the deep, sometimes surprising gladness that Christ has come to you (John 15:11; 1 Pet 1:8–9). Now get this:

- Not just to “the religious people.”
- Not just to “the put-together families.”

But to shepherds and outsiders and ordinary people.

Brené Brown describes joy as one of the most vulnerable emotions we experience.<sup>11</sup> It’s risky to let yourself be glad, because you’re afraid the other shoe will drop. That’s why the angel has to say first, “Do not be afraid” (Luke 2:10). Joy asks us to risk gladness because God’s love has moved in and is not going anywhere (Rom 5:5).

In Advent terms:

- Love is Christ moving in.
- Joy is the music that starts playing when we realize he’s really here.<sup>12</sup>

## Take Away: Love and Joy in Marion

So what do Love-that-stays and Joy-that-breaks-in look like here, now, in Marion, Indiana.

Well, there are three small, concrete invitations:

### 1. Receive Love as a Dwelling, not a Drop-In

Some of us imagine God like a landlord who does surprise inspections, checking to see if we’ve broken anything. That doesn’t create joy; it creates anxiety. John says God in

<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur, *Luke 1–24*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012).

Christ “made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). That is covenant language: “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Lev 26:12; Rev 21:3).

This week, take a few minutes of simple, quiet prayer and say, “Jesus, you have moved in; help me to remember that Love here even in the hard times.” (Rom 8:1).

## 2. Let Joy Find You at the Edges

Notice where the angel went: he went to places we don’t really want to go – to the edge. If you are on the edge right now—tired, worried about money, unsure how Christmas is going to work—congratulations, you are exactly the kind of person God likes to surprise (Matt 5:3-6; Luke 6:20-23).

This week, pay attention to where joy tries to sneak up on you: A child’s laugh. A song on the radio that hits different. A moment of kindness in the grocery line.

Instead of brushing it off, whisper, “Thank you, Lord. Let your joy root deeper than my fear” (1 Thess 5:16–18). Joy is not pretending everything is fine; joy is trusting that Christ is present and at work even when everything is not fine

Kelly wrote that when we live from the Divine Center, “life from the Center is a life of unhurried peace and power.”<sup>13</sup> I would add: it is also a life of quiet, resilient joy (Gal 5:22–23).

## Conclusion – Love Stays, Joy Sings

So, Friends: Last week, snow kept us apart. Today, Love gathers us again. Today, Joy breaks in again. Love has come to stay. Joy has come to sing. Faith receives this Christ. Obedience walks it out in love. And Joy becomes the music our obedience makes.

As we move back into silence in a few moments, I invite you to hold before the Lord one place where you need to trust that Love has really moved in... Or one place where you long to hear Joy’s song again.

And as we wait, remember: even when services are cancelled, even when plans are disrupted,

the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5).

Amen.

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941).