

Devotions for the Season

Fourth Week of Advent: An Altogether Joy



Our Advent journey requires a road map, one that will orient us in the right direction and chart our progress. For this Advent, we turn to one of the most important sermons that John Wesley ever preached. It was on July 25, 1741 that John Wesley preached a sermon to his fellow Oxford University colleagues called "The Almost Christian," in which he described a person who, on the surface, had all the outward appearance of godliness. This person did all the basic things right: practiced decency toward others, went to church, abstained from bad behavior, and sincerely tried to do his or her best. But Wesley would say that as commendable as that person might be (and wouldn't it be great if everyone were at least that good!), such a person would only be *almost* a Christian.

Instead, Wesley called followers of Jesus to live an "altogether" life, one that first of all fully loves God; second to fully love others; and third to have a full trust and confidence in God, so that the faith is not just an exercise in intellectual conviction, but a holistic offering of mind, body, and spirit. An altogether Christian is one who unreservedly and wholeheartedly trusts God and puts that trust into action.

Each day of Advent we will take one of the questions John Wesley asked in his sermon "An Almost Christian" and use it to bring us from an almost faith into an altogether love of God. Each day sit around an advent wreath, this week light four candles, and then share your highs and lows, read the scripture of the day, talk about the Wesley question, pray together, making sure to include your highs and lows, and at the end of the day say to each person in your home the blessing:

May the Holy God of Joy help you focus on the gift of the Christ Child.

Sunday, Dec. 22nd, Day 22

Do I believe that Christ loved me and gave himself for me?

John 3:16

"Every child of God, including you, should know that there is One who loves you tenderly, fiercely, and aggressively. Even if your past or present is dark. Even if you aren't perfect. Even if you feel dirty or have no shoes!" Rev. Susan Robb

Monday, Dec. 23rd, Day 23

Do I have faith in Christ's blood?

Colossians 1:20

"May we be ever grateful for Jesus' blood—blood shed for the redemption, reconciliation, and restoration of the whole world."

Rev. Rachel Billups

Grab Gather Grow

Read over Psalm 30:1-5, 11-12 then discuss the following:

1. In what ways do you attempt to create joy during the weeks before Christmas? during other times?
2. Why do you think altogether joy is something that can only be received?
3. How can you open yourself more fully to receiving God's joy?
4. As we have journeyed these last few weeks through a Wesleyan Advent experience, what has helped you most experience peace, hope, love and joy?

Tuesday, Dec. 24th, Christmas Eve, Day 24

Worship with us today: 10am Maranatha; 4pm Family Friendly; 7pm Solos, Candles, Carols, Lessons; 9pm Recovery Worship; and 11:00pm Choir, Candles & Carols

Do I believe that Jesus has taken away my sins and cast them as a stone into the depth of the sea?

"While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

John Wesley's Journal, May 24, 1738, speaking about his experience while reading Martin Luther's preface to Romans.

CHRISTMAS DAY, Wednesday, Dec. 25th, Day 25

Read Luke 2 and reflect on the Wesley Hymn "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

Thursday, Dec. 26th, Day 26

Do I believe that Jesus has blotted out the handwriting that was against me, taking it out of the way, nailing it to his cross? Colossians 2:13-14

"In my marriage, I had to learn to trust that my spouse was with me not because I did everything the right way. I was loved, and I loved him, and there was no need to keep track of our mistakes. As Paul tells us, we shouldn't be distracted by those expectations. "Just go ahead with what you've been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now *live* him." (Colossians 2:6-7). We can stop keeping score. After all, God has." Rev. Katie Z. Dawson

Friday, Dec. 27th, Day 27

Do I feel the assurance that I have been redeemed of my sins? Luke 5:20

"Here are the facts: 1) You can't cajole, bribe, manipulate, or sweet-talk God into doing things for you. 2) You don't have to... I hope you don't miss Christmas this year. God loves you! Jesus came on a rescue mission so that you can be accepted and loved and adopted and forgiven. Merry Rescue Mission!" Rev. Jim Cowart

Saturday, Dec. 28th, Day 28

Do I feel the assurance of the Spirit that I am a child of God? Romans 8:38-39

"I am a beloved child of God, and so are you. God's love for me is deeper than my comprehension of love, and for that I am truly grateful. May we feel the assurance that we are children of God!" Rev. Kim Montenegro

Sunday, Dec. 29th, Day 29

**Worship at BUMC—10am (one service only) Pastor Henry Preaching
Fellowship Potluck (bring something to share) to follow**

**Service Project after fellowship time: Christmas Basket assembling and delivery
Bring some Christmas goodies with you to worship. Help fill up the trays on the table in the fellowship hall. Once completed volunteer to deliver them to one of the local service organization as a thank you from BUMC.**

*Can I lift my hand up to heaven, and declare to him that lives forever and ever,
"Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you?"*

Psalm 139

The Lord searches us and knows all things, and yet still invites us into the life of God. May we declare, 'You know that I loved you!'" Rev. Matt Rawle