



## REFERENCES

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- [Isaiah 12:2-6](#)
  - [Zephaniah 3:14-20](#)
  - [Philippians 4:4-7](#)
  - [Luke 3:7-18](#)
  - Week three is the time to throw the parties! This is the joy Sunday, the celebration of the gift that comes and the gift we are to and with one another. Let there be shouts of praise and hope. Let there be laughter and joy. But don't let it be simply a surface experience, a pretending all is well when there are many for whom all is not well. But let there be a deep reservoir from which joy can be drawn and tasted. Speak of the joy that sustains, the presence that abides, even in the difficult moments, even on the cloudy days. All of which means we don't force people into a certain kind of response; we simply make an offer – an offer of joy.

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Christmas

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- How do we do that? We tell stories! Who in your community seems to be a person of joy, no matter what? Who finds ways of celebrating for the oddest occasions? Who can talk with authenticity about finding joy in the

midst of despair? They are likely to share that their realization doesn't make the pain go away, but it does give it a gilded edge, or perhaps a new perspective, or the resources to continue. Tell the stories, the deep stories of joy in the midst of your own community. Those stories are there, sometimes you have to look for them, but they are there.

- There is also anticipatory joy that is best seen in children. They are trying their best to hold it in for another week and a bit, but it is about to burst out of them. Let it. Let them express their joy in singing or acting or moving. Let them dance during the hymns. Set them free to let the joy be seen in their little bodies. It can't help but infect the rest of the congregation. (OK, I know "infect" isn't the best word to use these days, but it seemed appropriate!) Let them influence; let them raise up; let them help put smiles on faces not used to smiling anymore. No, it doesn't change difficult circumstances, but it is a promise that there is a reversal on the way. There is a kin-dom on the way.
- We are depicting the joy of coming home to a welcome that sweeps us off our feet. Even if many of us can't find it anywhere but here. So, let it be here. Let this be a sign of the coming kin-dom. Remind us all that there is joy in this home. Promised joy. Felt joy. Real joy. Let's lean into joy today.
- Rev. Dr. Derek Weber, Director of Preaching Ministries, served churches in Indiana and Arkansas and the British Methodist Church. His PhD is from University of Edinburgh in preaching and media. He has taught preaching in seminary and conference settings for more than 20 years.



### WEEK 3: HOME AWAY FROM HOME

*Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter Jerusalem!  
The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,  
he has turned away your enemies.  
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;  
you shall fear disaster no more.  
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
Do not fear, O Zion;  
do not let your hands grow weak.  
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,  
a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness,  
he will renew you  
in his love;*

*he will exult over you with loud singing  
as on a day of festival.*

*I will remove disaster from you,  
so that you will not bear reproach for it.*

*I will deal with all your oppressors  
at that time.*

*And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.*

*At that time I will bring you home,  
at the time when I gather you;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes, says the Lord.*

*(Zeph. 3:14-20)*

Zephaniah lived and wrote during the tumultuous time of the reign of King Josiah. Zephaniah witnessed a time of turmoil and chaos for the people of Israel. And, like many of the prophets, Zephaniah encouraged the people to respond to the situation with singing, rejoicing, and exultation. When the world around you is on fire, sometimes this is the only response you can give.[1]

For me, singing and music evoke strong memories of Christmas. “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” was a favorite that my parents would dance to. My father liked to sing “I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus” to my mother and sneak a kiss, and it wasn’t until I was an adult that I realized why that song made any sense. My mother’s favorite Christmas carol was “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” At her request, we sang it at her memorial service in October 2020. Each year, as we start clearing the dishes from the Thanksgiving meal, that is when I start playing Christmas music. My family cuts me off on New Year’s Day, though lately, I have made the liturgical argument that I should be able to listen to Christmas music through Epiphany. I can’t imagine Advent and Christmas without the music.

Our project this week focuses on Christmas music. We will spread Christmas joy by singing and caroling with others in our community.

**Christmas Caroling Project** - Listen to your small group's favorite Christmas hits playlist throughout this week. Sing along with the songs in preparation to go Christmas caroling in a small group. If it is safe to do so, travel as a group to the homes of some church members who are unwillingly absent and sing some of these songs to them. Gather as a group to discuss the experience after you have caroled together.

Weekly discussion questions:

- 1) What song did you submit and why? What meaning does it hold for you?
  - 2) What song has become a new favorite for you? Why?
  - 3) How has this project affected? Your relationship with someone else? Your relationship with God?
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[1] *Feasting on the Word*, 53.