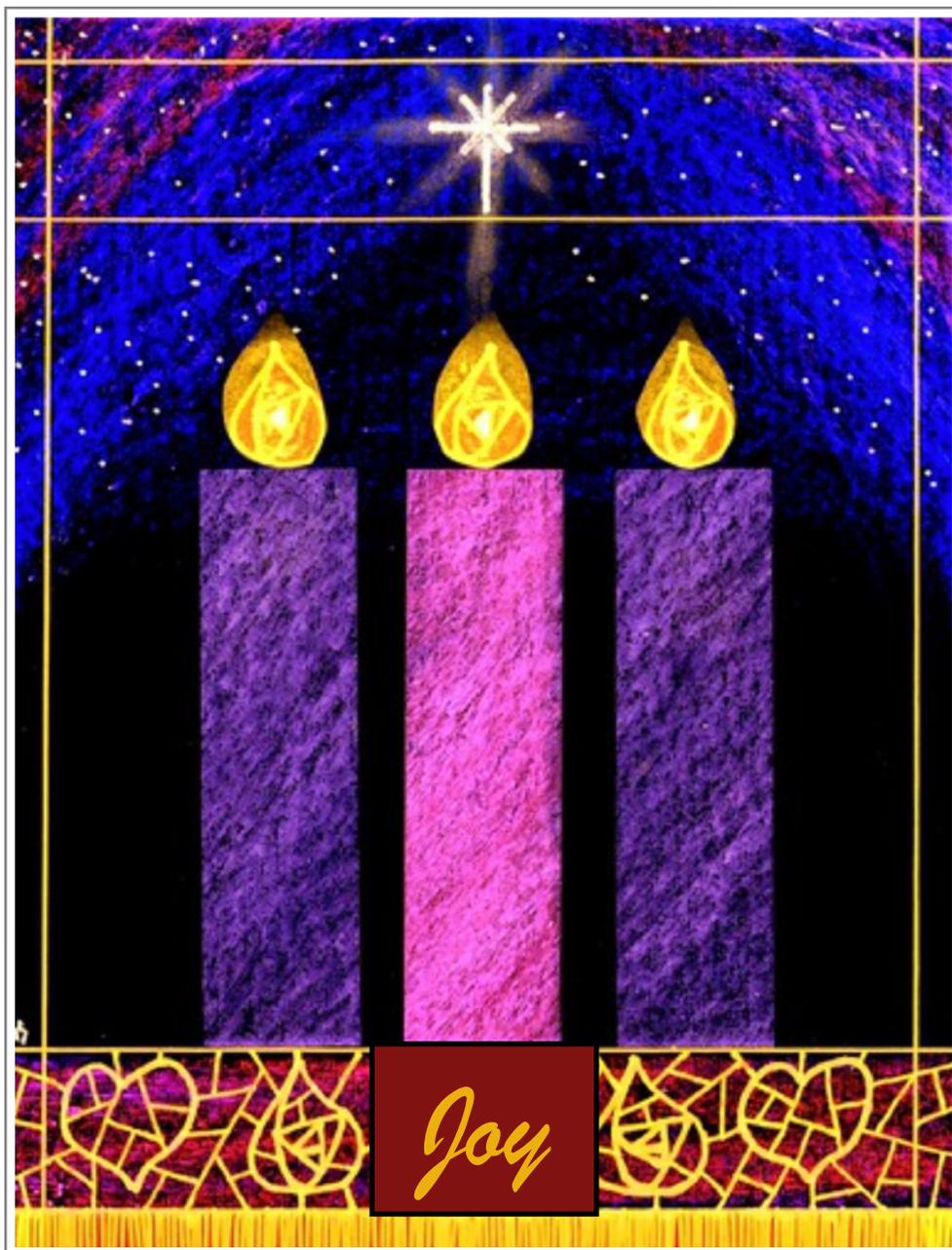


# "The Heart of Joy"

*Luke 3:7-18*

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Somewhere I read about a meeting of a group of software designers. They were using typical technical jargon to discuss a data exchange interface with a vendor.

One engineer said the programming that had been ordered was delayed because the vendor was suffering from a *"severe nonlinear waterfowl issue."*

Curious, the team leader raised his eyebrows and asked, *"What exactly is a severe nonlinear waterfowl issue?"*

😏 The engineer replied, *"They don't have all their ducks in a row."*<sup>1</sup> 😏

On this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent, the crowds were doing what crowds tend to do, they were following each other like ducklings blindly following their mama to be baptized by John. And with each dunk the Baptist grew more and more infuriated until he pops, stops and starts this rant of a sermon by calling them a *"brood of vipers!"* 😏 Not exactly an introduction to a Carnegie course on how to win friends and influence people. 😏 Don't forget, this is Christ's cousin who is angry. They grew up playing together. They probably followed Mary and Elizabeth around like ducklings as they stopped here and there and everywhere making lessons out of life for the son of God! He knows exactly who Jesus is. And so Christ's cousin tells the crowd, as he is telling us, we have a severe nonlinear waterfowl issue. Or to smooth off the edges and put it in a more friendly way that more people will like, he's asking us do we have all our ducks in a row for the coming of the Messiah?



To drive the point home the Baptist goes from case to case, from the haves to the have nots, from the tax collectors to the soldiers, from the commoners to the noble elite. And when John asks if their lives *"bear fruit"* and, are they *"green with life?"* it's a radical clue as to how we get our ducks in a row. It's not enough for them, it's not enough for a disciple of Jesus, it's not enough for us to claim to *"be"* different. The only way to tell what lies in someone's heart is their actions. The *"proof is in the pudding"* so to speak.

Our God is about relationships. That's why we celebrate Christmas, Easter, and everything between so that our relationship with God will *"bear fruit"*, so that our relationship with others will be *"green with life"* and, as we'll soon see, so we can embody **The Heart of Joy**.

In one of Max Lucado's books he tells about a trip his family took to the United Kingdom. They visited a castle. In the center of the castle garden sat a maze with row after row of shoulder-high hedges, leading to one dead end after another. If you successfully navigate the labyrinth, you discover the door to a tall tower in the center of the garden.

He says that if you were to look at their family pictures of the trip, you'd see four of their five family members standing on the top of the tower. Hmm, someone is still on the ground. Guess who? Lucado says he was stuck in the foliage, lost in the maze. He couldn't figure out which way to go. But then he heard a voice from above. *"Hey, Dad."* He looked up to the top of the tower to see his daughter Sara, peering through the turret. *"You're going the wrong way,"* she explained. *"Back up and turn right."*





Do you think he trusted her? He didn't have to, he points out. He could have trusted his own instincts, consulted other confused tourists, sat and pouted and wondered why God would let this happen to him. But do you know what he did? He listened. Her vantage point was better than his. She was above the maze. She could see what he couldn't. <sup>2</sup>

God's perspective on your life is flawless. There are several things God probably would ask you about if you were to listen: your relationships with your family, friends and others; your priorities with regard to your use of your time and money. Maybe that secret thing that you run to every time you're feeling bad about yourself. That thing always complicates our lives. It drags us down. It causes us to turn away from God when God is trying to nudge us toward our highest potential. It causes us to drift out of range of God's voice.

The crowds around John were not the only ones who needed to turn back to God to make ready for the coming King. We too must take stock of our lives, particularly our relationship with God.

There is a spot-on story of a sixty-four-year-old mother with an interesting library. Her bookcase is separated into three sections. The first rack contains books on psychology and theology. Many are thick textbooks full of mile-long words. The second rack in the bookcase is stocked with medical textbooks and journals. There seems to be a special focus on genetics and medicine on this rack. And the third rack is jampacked with multiple issues of HEAVY EQUIPMENT DIGEST. Quite a contrast, don't you think. A stranger visiting her home might say that she is a woman of diverse interests. Her sons, however, know that she is a devoted mother. You see, one son is a Christian counselor, and so this mother reads all his old text books in order to learn more about his work. He is represented by the first rack in the bookcase. This mother also reads the books and medical journals on the second rack so that she can understand the work that her second son does. He is a doctor, and is active in cancer research. And what about the subscription to HEAVY EQUIPMENT DIGEST? Well, that represents a third son who spent years in that field. This mother spends considerable time and energy to acquaint herself with her sons' interests, in order to better understand them. Is it important to her to know about Freud and DNA and bulldozers? Probably not, but it is important that her sons know they are loved. <sup>3</sup>



The crowds around John knew they were loved because he was relentless in helping them get ready for the coming King. The coming king who would go on to say that there is no greater love than those who put their lives on the line for their family, friends and those God places in our lives. We too must be relentless in putting our lives on the line for our family and friends and those God places in our lives.

Friends, as we approach Emmanuel, God with us, I pray that you do not have a severe nonlinear waterfowl issue. I pray that you experience that there is nothing in all the earth that can bring you more joy than to turn to God and follow the creators lead through the labyrinth of this thing called life. I pray that you put your life on the line helping your friends, family and those God's placed in your life do the same. Why, because that's how you and yours embody **the Heart of Joy!**

Amen?!

<sup>1</sup> King Duncan. *A Road Straight to Your Heart*. [Dynamic Preaching Sermons Fourth Quarter 2012](#).



<sup>2</sup> *The Lucado Inspirational Reader: Hope and Encouragement for Your Everyday Life*

<sup>3</sup> Max Anders, *Jesus*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 184.

