

Invitation to know and worship God:

I was glad when they said, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Let your gentleness be apparent to all. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Prayer with Invocation and Confession:

Our holy and kind Father, you have brought us through Jesus your beloved Son into the great eternal assembly of your people. While still in our earthly bodies you have joined us with the heavenly ones and our meeting now here is part of our heavenly communion. Thank you for bringing us into this new life with your Son. Forgive us for allowing our minds to drift into vain and passing things as if they were the reality and the limit of your purposes for us. Forgive us when we have grown dull and the joy which is ours has stalled. Refresh us now in the awareness of what you have done so much to achieve for us.

In Jesus' Name, we pray, Amen

Hymn: *by Philip Doddridge*

1. Hark, the glad sound! The Saviour comes, the Saviour promised long!
Let every heart prepare a throne, and every voice a song.
2. He comes the prisoners to release, in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before Him burst, the iron fetters yield.
3. He comes the broken heart to bind, the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the riches of His grace, to enrich the humbled poor.
4. Our glad Hosannas, Prince of Peace, thy welcome shall proclaim;
and heaven's eternal arches ring, with Thy beloved Name.

Prayer, Intercession: *For the suffering church, (composed by Patrick Sookhdeo)*

Lord, why were You forsaken, abandoned on that tree of curse and shame?
Why were you left alone, bereft of Your Father's love and care?

Today Your people seem forsaken, left alone in cruel hands,
Persecuted, violently abused, martyred.
Make real to them Your presence and Your love.

Lord, Victim, Priest and King, come to Your suffering people,

Heal their brokenness, bind up their wounds, remove their distress, and be their hope and future.

Scriptures:

- **Leviticus 26.1-13** (ponder the will of Yahweh God to make us happy by providing a true path for His people to walk in. This is the only way available for health and happiness and it is glorious.)
- **Matthew 5:1-12** (it is good to remind ourselves of the way of happiness, similar to Old Testament as in Leviticus, but more wonderfully developed.)

Hymn: *by Charles Wesley*

1. Jesus comes with all his grace, comes to save a fallen race,
object of our glorious hope, Jesus comes to lift us up.
2. Let the living stones cry out, every child of Abraham shout;
praise we all our lowly King, give him thanks, rejoice and sing.
3. He has our salvation wrought, he our captive souls has bought,
he has reconciled to God, he has washed us in his blood.
4. We are now his lawful right, walk as children of the light;
we shall soon obtain the grace, pure in heart, to see his face.
5. We shall gain our calling's prize; after God we all shall rise,
filled with joy, and love, and peace, perfected in holiness.

Sermon: Solid Joys and lasting pleasures

The first word Jesus said to His disciples on returning from hell, death and all the eternal darkness Satan was planning for the human race was “Rejoice”! Be happy forever! The same announcement from Yahweh God announcing His Son's birth 33 years before.

A common perception – and deception is that the closer you get to God the further you are cut off from pleasures and joys. And if you are enjoying yourself God is like drumming his fingers and rolling his eyes at the angels waiting for you to get back to the serious joyless stuff of obedience!

Wait a minute! Joy is in the constitution of the kingdom of God. If Satan can't rip off God's power and majesty he will certainly try to deface and slander the One who dwells in the unapproachable light of the beauty of holiness. The Biblical fact is our Creator delights in making his humans happy. Israel was at peace, they ate, they drank, and they were happyⁱ.

The cosmos is set up to thrill the sons of God. The Covenants take it further. For David, bringing the ark, the holy Covenant containing the great law of God for Israel back to Jerusalem was one of the most ecstatically happy moments of his life. David knew the joy that flows from obedience and the symbol of that energised him with joy – he skipped and laughed his way into the city as the priests brought the tabernacle homeⁱⁱ.

It is right to be joyous before God. Keep your joy! Nourish it by Thanksgiving. A mouthwash of Thanksgiving on waking every morning is arguably the best tonic and health-food you could ever get. God smiles at your happiness. Remember Eric Liddell's comment to his sister when she tried to persuade him to give up athletics and keep himself for missionary work – “But when I run I feel God's smile upon me”.

The joys of knowing God and doing his will

Yes, there are days of challenge and even perplexity, pain, grief and deep questioning. Suffering helps us enter deeply into Christ too. Apostle Paul testifies to that. But even such times are reconstituted into joy in God's time and purpose! And for our good in the end.

Childlike faith is the joy that finds you humming away. Watch your pre-schooler grandies. When they are absorbed in the happiness of the day they are often singing and murmuring with all sorts of indistinguishable sounds. Elementary speaking in tongues, I wonder? Become like children to enter the Kingdom, urged Jesus. Catch those frowns and mouth downturns and use them as re-learning opportunities to realise afresh that our all-powerful Judge of the living and the dead can look at us and say "How beautiful you are my darling"ⁱⁱⁱ in the whisper of the blood-paying Redeemer.

Be happy! This is the living Word from our true home where the forerunner Son has anchored our souls and our forever parent watches and enjoys! If our Lord urges us to "rejoice"! it must be right to do so and there must be good grounds to do so! Go with him against emotions and circumstances to the contrary if necessary.

This is the climax of Paul's teaching in Romans^{iv}. Believing and receiving this gift of reconciliation – this eternal, embracing largesse of friendship with our Creator and Redeemer-Lover must give way to a rejoicing of song. We are DNA'd to overflow with joy. The lying tragedy is that many in these 'days of Noah' despising the law of Christ are blinded by the spirit of the age from walking as repentant and forgiven in righteousness.

Conscience precedes emotion in the journey of joy.

At last the whole of heaven and its millions of angels and all the saints (once just ordinary folk) shall sing for joy as the great One breaks the fixed seals and opens up the possibility of God's righteous judgements^v. Let the Holy Spirit attune our hearts to solid joys and lasting pleasures.

Prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, you have done everything to bring us joy forever. To come in and out of your presence to receive and give love, to have your wisdom for daily living, to learn your wonderful laws, to be fearless in this dangerous world, to have rock-solid hope that the best is always before us. Help me never to stray or be deluded by Satan. Help me to honour you by rejoicing and thanking you daily.

I pledge this promise to you now, in Jesus Name, Amen

Hymn: *Charles Wesley, adapted in Salvation Army hymnbook*

1. O how happy are they who the Saviour obey,
And have laid up their treasure above.
Tongue can never express the sweet comfort and peace
Of a soul filled with Jesus' love.
2. That sweet comfort is mine now the favour divine
I've received through the blood of the Lamb;
With my heart I believe, and what joy I receive,
What a Heaven in Jesus' name!

The joys of knowing God and doing his will

3. 'Tis a Heaven below my redeemer to know,
And the angels can do nothing more
Than to fall at his feet and the story repeat,
And the lover of sinners adore.
4. O the rapturous height of the holy delight
Which I feel in the life-giving blood!
Of my Saviour possessed, I am perfectly bless-ed,
As if filled with the Heaven of God.

Benediction:

God has chosen you from the beginning to be saved by the sanctification of the Spirit and by faith in the truth. To this, He called you through our gospel, so that you may share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, beloved stand firm and cling to the truths of Scripture handed down to you by the Apostles and Prophets.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who by grace has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good word and deed.

This service was prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA

ⁱ 1Kings 4.20

ⁱⁱ 1 Chron 15.29

ⁱⁱⁱ Song 4.1

^{iv} Rom 5.11

^v Rev 5