

Christmas Day
Isaiah 9: 2-7; Titus 2: 11-14; Luke 2: 1-20
St James, Shirley 25 December 2025

Sermon: Joy at Christmas... and Beyond

Today, of all days, we hear the angels proclaim it: “Good news of great joy for all the people.”

Joy is the word that rings out from the shepherds’ hillside, from Isaiah’s prophecy, from Paul’s letter to Titus, and from the Church of England’s Christmas theme this year. Joy is our Christmas gift.

But joy is a word we sometimes struggle with. It can sound a bit too bright, a bit too cheerful, especially if life has been heavy. And for some in our congregation today — those who are grieving, those who are anxious, those who are carrying burdens quietly — joy might feel like something other people get to feel.

So what is Christian joy? Because the joy the angels speak of is not the same as seasonal cheerfulness. It’s not the joy of everything being perfect. It’s not the joy of pretending. It’s something deeper, steadier, more surprising. And it’s something we can carry with us long after the decorations come down.

Joy begins in the dark

Isaiah begins with a people walking in darkness. This wasn’t just poetry — this was real political turmoil, exile, fear, uncertainty. And yet he dares to say:

Christmas Day
Isaiah 9: 2-7; Titus 2: 11-14; Luke 2: 1-20
St James, Shirley 25 December 2025

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

Joy, in the biblical sense, is not the absence of darkness. It is the presence of God’s promise within the darkness. Look at the things that come into life from a place of darkness: a flower, a baby, the world itself – all created in darkness and brought into light.

As theologian NT. Wright puts it: “Joy is what happens when God finally does what God has promised. It is the eruption of hope fulfilled.”

And that means joy is not fragile. It doesn’t depend on how we feel today. It doesn’t depend on whether this year has been easy or hard. Joy is rooted in *God’s* faithfulness — in the God who keeps His word even when times are tough.

Joy grows when we treasure and ponder

Luke gives us one of the most beautiful lines in the whole Christmas story when he writes: about how “Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”

Mary doesn’t rush past that moment. She doesn’t simply celebrate and move on. She pauses so she can treasure and ponder. She holds the moment and lets it speak to her.

And that’s where joy deepens.

Christmas Day
Isaiah 9: 2-7; Titus 2: 11-14; Luke 2: 1-20
St James, Shirley 25 December 2025

Because Joy doesn't need to be loud or frantic or over the top.

Joy is something we notice when we stop long enough to treasure what God has done and then ponder what it means.

This is why Christmas Day is such a gift. It gives us a pause — even a brief one — to treasure and ponder.

To treasure the people around us. To treasure the memories of those we love but see no longer. To treasure the small signs of God's goodness that have carried us through the year. To treasure the truth that God has come close — not in power, but in vulnerability; not in splendour, but in a manger.

You who are here today have paused, great, wonderful – now I encourage you to ponder and treasure.

Joy is found in God's grace and our response

St Paul writes to Titus that the grace of God has appeared — and that this grace doesn't just save us, it shapes us. It makes us “eager to do what is good.” Because joy is not passive and it's not just something we feel, it's something that drives us and inspires us.

Christmas Day
Isaiah 9: 2-7; Titus 2: 11-14; Luke 2: 1-20
St James, Shirley 25 December 2025

When we know we are loved, forgiven, and held by God — we become people who want to share that love. People who want to do good. People who want to bring light into the world.

Joy is not escapism from life's problems or found by ignoring the problems in society - Joy is an energy for goodness.

And that's why joy is so needed in our anxious and fearful society. Not because it distracts us from the world's problems, but because it equips us to face them with hope & do something about them.

Joy is for all people — including those with burdens.

The angels say it plainly: “Good news of great joy for all the people.” Not just the cheerful, not just the confident, not just the ones who feel “Christmassy,” but all the people. And that includes those who come to church today with a quiet ache, those who are missing someone at the table, and those who feel the gap between how Christmas looks and how life feels.

The joy of Christmas does not deny grief; it sits alongside it, offering hope and strength for whatever we are carrying. The God who comes to us in Jesus steps into a real world — a world of tears and hope, of loss and love. The manger is not placed in a perfect scene; it is placed in a world that needs saving.

Christmas Day
Isaiah 9: 2-7; Titus 2: 11-14; Luke 2: 1-20
St James, Shirley 25 December 2025

And that means the joy of Christmas is big enough to hold our sorrow, gentle enough to sit with us, and strong enough to carry us.

Joy is a gift — but it grows when we take it seriously. This year, the Church of England invites us to rediscover joy, not as a feeling we chase but as a gift we receive and a truth we live.

We take joy seriously when we treasure what God has done; when we ponder what it means for us and for the world; when we notice the good in our lives and communities; when we act with kindness, courage, and compassion; when we reject the voices and powers that spread hate, fear and discord.

Joy is not something we manufacture — it is something we receive. And when we do, joy becomes not just a Christmas moment but a way of living.

Joy beyond Christmas

The decorations will come down, the leftovers will be eaten, and the familiar routines will return, yet the joy of Christmas — the joy of God-with-us — is not seasonal. It is a gift for January as much as for today, even when the early alarm clock rings out. Joy is for the ordinary days as well as the difficult ones, for the moments when we feel strong and the moments when we feel fragile.

Christmas Day
Isaiah 9: 2-7; Titus 2: 11-14; Luke 2: 1-20
St James, Shirley 25 December 2025

Joy is the steady light that shines because Christ has come and Christ is with us. So today, may we receive this gift of joy; may we treasure it, ponder it, carry it — and may it carry us. Amen.

Rev'd Richard Haynes Christmas Day 2025