

# Tidings of comfort and joy

Christmas is coming, and these last days of Advent should be a happy time. Children are writing letters to Santa, Christmas lights are everywhere, and the beautifully wrapped presents are under the tree.

This week we are lighting the pink candle on our Advent wreath as we say, “Gaudete!”

Gaudete! Rejoice! Our Savior is coming. God gives us the greatest Gift He can bestow on us—the Christ Child. The night sky will be full of light and choruses of angels. Love will be born in a stable in Bethlehem. The world will be full of joy.

Joy.

Joy has been on my mind this Advent. In many ways, this past year was a wonderful year, a year of growth and positive change. My family has received some extraordinary gifts and blessings, and I am overcome with gratitude at how God has brought light to darkness.

I look at my family, my children. I see how they are thriving, and my heart is, indeed, full of joy.

But this has also been a year of grief. And when I look ahead to Christmas, I have to admit that I do not always feel like rejoicing. Many of my family members and friends are carrying their own burdens, grieving the loss of loved ones. I cannot pretend that Christmas, for them, will be entirely happy. My heart hurts for and with them.

Even when the world around us rejoices, though, there is room for sorrow. There is room for sadness. There is room for each of us and whatever emotions we bring to the manger. Like a shepherd called from our work with our sheep in the fields, we bring what little we have.

Sometimes what we have isn’t beautifully wrapped in paper and tied with a bow. Sometimes what we have is just ourselves, feeling worn and empty, wanting and

needing the comfort and strength only Jesus can offer.

There is a place for that at Christmas, too.

On Gaudete Sunday, my husband and I went to the most extraordinary concert at our parish. A men's chamber ensemble named Quorus sang an amazing array of Christmas music in our church.

We had made last-minute plans to go, and I hadn't paid attention to what kind of music would be performed. I wasn't prepared—not for the beauty, and not for the constant reminders of my brother-in-law Eric, who died suddenly in October.

Eric had this amazing voice and ear for music. He sang with a men's a cappella group in college. He would have thoroughly enjoyed this concert. Afterward, he would have commented on the harmonies and the arrangements and maybe even sung on the way home.

When the concert ended, I turned to my husband. Right away, he mentioned Eric. And I was happy Eric was on our minds. But I was also sad to think of those who will miss Eric this Christmas.

Joy can be bittersweet.

"Joy to the world" doesn't mean we are all happy all the time. And joy is not always the splendor of Christmas morning. Sometimes it lies deep within.

Though the sadness might be what is bubbling to the surface, there is deep down a joy that is greater than the pain and tears. That is the joy that knows that God becomes man, that there is something bigger than ourselves, and that though hearts might ache on this earth, there is a greater, more perfect joy that awaits us—because Love came to the world 2000 years ago.

Maybe joy is just a glimmer for you this Christmas. Maybe this holiday season will find you putting one foot in front of another, looking for the small moments of beauty and light.

If so, I hope you feel our Father's love this Christmas. And I hope, I pray, that even if

your heart is heavy, you will find some comfort in knowing that Christ was born in Bethlehem for you.