

Philippians 4:4-7

Advent 1; November 30, 2025

Christmas Peace?

Did you wake up this morning filled with joy? Did you look outside at a fresh blanket of snow and feel like a little kid again, thinking, I can't wait to go outside and play? Did you bounce out of bed... or did you wake up with aching joints and sore muscles from shoveling yesterday? Maybe before your first sip of coffee, your thoughts were already racing: I'm one day closer to Christmas... there's so much to do!

Did your mind start spinning like a hamster on a wheel? I'm not ready for Christmas. There are cookies to bake, decorations to hang, gifts to buy and wrap, and the house still needs cleaning!

And then Paul's words hit you: **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"** Rejoice... in what? My aching body? My overflowing to-do list? My busy schedule? My worries and anxieties? How can I rejoice in a world broken by sin and suffering? How can I rejoice when the chair that was filled by Grandpa last year is now empty?

Christmas in our minds is often a picture of peace and joy—but reality rarely looks that way. The presents, the cards, the activities—they all pile up, and it feels far from peaceful.

As we move closer to Christmas, let us listen to the words of the Apostle Paul. Let us hear about the true peace and joy that Jesus brings—a peace and joy that don't depend on circumstances, but on our Savior, whose birth we are preparing to celebrate.

Paul begins: **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"** And yet, when we read these words, it's hard not to wonder—how could he possibly say that? Paul writes these words from a prison cell. Death may be near. His remarkable ministry of proclaiming Christ is drawing to a close. And yet, even in the midst of such difficulty, Paul shouts: **"Rejoice!"**

He had endured riots. He had been shipwrecked three times. He had faced constant threats from people who wanted to kill him. He had worked without food or water at times. Paul had every reason to despair, every reason to feel anxious and afraid—and still he says, **"Rejoice!"**

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" It's easy to rejoice when life is going well. But how do we rejoice when things aren't going well—when worries, temptations, frustrations, and the harsh realities of everyday life press in?

And then there it is—the word that jumps off the page, blazing like a torch in the darkness: **ALWAYS**. Paul doesn't say sometimes rejoice or rejoice if you feel like it. He says **always**.

There are very few things in life we can truly say **always** about—but Paul points us to a joy that is not dependent on circumstances. This is a joy rooted in the Lord, a joy that remains steadfast even when everything around us seems to be falling apart. Paul's point is clear: our outward circumstances do not—and should not—determine the condition of a believer's heart.

Even in the darkest moments, a Christian's heart can still be full of joy. Why? Because our joy is anchored in our oneness with Christ. It is Christ who fills our hearts with the joy of forgiveness, the joy of knowing He will come again to bring us safely to Himself, and the joy of His presence near us each day.

God calls us to rejoice over a baby born in a humble, dusty stable over two thousand years ago. That joy can feel almost impossible to fully grasp—but it is real. And with it comes a peace that is just as remarkable: a peace that **"transcends all understanding, and will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** In Christ, we are given both joy and peace—gifts that remain firm and steady, even when the world around us is anything but calm.

It is that peace that has an effect in OUR lives. Paul writes: **“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”**

God’s peace is the peace that truly matters. It surpasses human understanding and cannot be fully grasped by our intellect. Nothing else can give a believer the deep, lasting serenity that comes from faith in Jesus.

God’s peace is also a guarding peace. The Philippians would have pictured Roman centurions standing watch, alert and unwavering. In the same way, God’s peace stands guard at the door of the believer’s heart. It protects us completely. It keeps us in faith. It shields us from worry. It fills us with joy, gentleness, and confidence.

That small child lying in Bethlehem—the very birth we are preparing to celebrate—is the guarantee and proof of this peace. It is a peace that transcends all understanding, a peace that holds firm even when the world around us is chaotic. This is the peace that Christmas brings, and it is ours in Christ.

As many of you know, I’m fascinated by airplanes. I like to track flights online, and sometimes I even listen in on the conversations between pilots and air traffic control. Last Wednesday, on that extremely windy day, I happened to watch a Southwest flight that was having a really challenging landing. The pilots had to attempt three separate approaches before they could safely touch down. The first two times, something didn’t feel right, so up they went again. If the third attempt hadn’t worked, they would have had to divert to Indianapolis. But finally, on the third try, the plane landed safely. I couldn’t help but wonder how the passengers felt in that moment—relieved, grateful, and maybe even joyful—that they were safely on the ground after such a tense landing.

Life can seem like that at times. We may not always be able to see the direction that God is taking us in this life. But he will bring us safely home. With Him in control, we have a peace beyond any peace in this world. We have a peace that moves us to be gentle to all who are around us. We have a peace that helps us to set our anxiousness aside. It is that peace fills our hearts always. May **“The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** Amen.