

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2025; Advent 3 – Gaudete Sunday.  
Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling.

Advent wreath prayer:

*Lord of Light and Joy, today we light the rose candle, a sign of rejoicing in the midst of our waiting. As the flame grows brighter, may our hearts be filled with the hope and gladness that only You can give. Bless this wreath and all who gather around it. May its light remind us that even in the shadows, your joy is our strength. Amen.*

Today we lit our pink candle on our advent wreath because this Sunday is known as “Rejoice Sunday,” or in the Latin, “Gaudete Sunday.” The theme I have described for Advent continues today, enshrined in our words from the Communion service, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again” focus on the coming of Jesus in three ways: his first, his present, and his final Advent, as the word Advent means ‘coming’. Gaudete Sunday, however, focuses on Christian joy and is when we are invited to take time out of our Advent preparations, and to rejoice.

In times past, Advent was known as a “little Lent.” because just as Lent is a time to prepare spiritually for the festival of Easter, Advent was always a time to prepare spiritually for the festival of Christmas. You might think then that penitential seasons tend not to focus on joy and focus instead on our need to repent and prepare the way of the Lord but whether the season is Lent or Advent, there is much to rejoice about. Even in penitential seasons, we can and should experience Joy and rejoice.

However, if you only perceive of joy as a human emotion, you might not always find it easy to rejoice and be joyful because you may be feeling overwhelmed with stress or struggling to keep it all together, or perhaps, you are just

going through the motions, trying to get through the season. You might be hiding behind your smile, pretending that this really is the most wonderful time of the year, even though you don't feel that way. Cares and concerns may be quenching your joy and to be told to rejoice today may be adding to your cares, not taking them away. If you are in that place, let me reassure you that joy is not the same thing as the feeling and demonstration of happiness, and you don't have to be happy to be joyful.

This is because in a spiritual sense and what Scripture refers to as Joy is not the same as human euphoria, or happiness, just as optimism is not the same as hope or intellectual belief is not the same as faith and affection is not the same as love. For Christians, our lives are not always happy, but we can always have joy, even in the midst of our sorrow. The Christian author Henri Nouwen puts it this way, *"Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us."*

In other words, we know, even when life gets us down, that our God loves us and promises to be with us, and He does that by giving us the gift of Joy. Nothing can take that away from us, and so we can always choose Joy knowing that it is deeper and stronger than any surface happiness or sadness that we may find in this world. Joy is our way as Christians of refusing to let the headlines in our world win, of looking at the worst this world can offer, and seeing it in the shadow of the cross that reminds us of His love for us, and our world, a love that is stronger than any unhappiness that we will ever find in this world. Not even death itself will take our Joy away and it will be the first thing we will experience after we die, and we can also be assured that even though our loved ones may no longer be with us in

this life, they too will be experiencing the Joy that is Heaven. To know this and experience Joy, is the key to living the Christian life.

Joy is a gift from God by the Holy Spirit, not something we somehow create as a feeling and because it is a gift, the Holy Spirit will nurture our joy within us if we let Him. St Paul tells us to practise joy always, *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.”*

To choose joy is to be gifted God’s strength and His love. It is a gift that dwells deep down in our hearts and is given to stay, not superficial like a passing smile or happy feeling. It is something that can be nurtured and when we do, we will find ourselves rejoicing, no matter our circumstances, because although sometimes circumstances cannot be changed, our perspective can, if we choose Joy and let it move us to rejoicing in the Lord. Let it move you today.

Thanks be to God. Amen.