

Deeply Rooted in the Discipline of Celebration

Joy to the World!

If I had to choose my favorite Christmas Carol it would have to be *Joy to the World!* The funny thing is that this song, written by Isaac Watts in 1719, wasn't intended to be a song for Christmas, but was a paraphrase of Psalm 98. Psalm 98 is one of the Royal Psalms (Psalms 93-100) and emphasizes our joy in the face of God's kingship over all the earth.

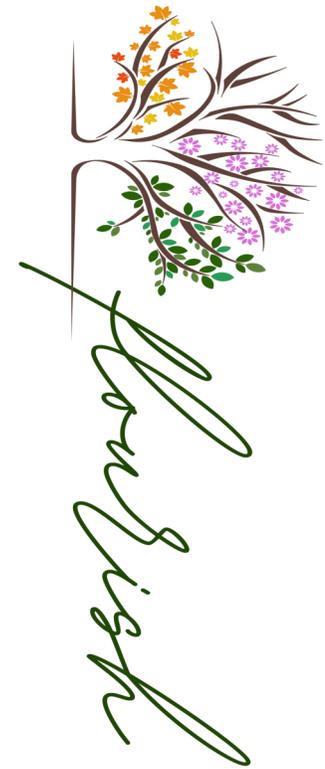
Joy to the World! The Lord is Come! At Christmas, we celebrate His first coming, when He came as a baby. It is a joyous time, a time to celebrate, because He came to be the Savior of the World (John 1:29). Jesus was born as a baby, and then grew to be a man, and died on the cross as our Savior. Through this He won the victory over Satan and death (Hebrews 2:14-15). We sing with joy for *He has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God* (Psalm 98:2b, 3b). With the birth of Jesus, and ultimately His death and resurrection, the gift of salvation has been made available to all who believe (John 3:16).

Our response to the gift of salvation should be one of joyful rejoicing. We should celebrate this gift, and loudly: ***Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music*** (Psalm 98:4). We are so filled with joy in God as our king, that we cannot contain it, and we burst forth with joy! We are shouting loudly because of His salvation. With our shouts should come music and singing (v. 5) and blasts of trumpets (v. 6).

This joyous song is for all the earth. Verse 2 of *Joy to the World* says, *Joy to the World! The Savior reigns, let men their songs employ, while fields and flocks, rocks, hills and plains, repeat the sounding joy.*" Psalm 98:7-8 talk about the sea resounding, which means thundering or roaring; the rivers are clapping their hands and the mountains are singing together, or as Charles Spurgeon described, *"the songs of the seas and the hallelujahs of the hills."* The earth is rejoicing because the Lord is King over all, and He is coming again someday to judge all the earth. ***Let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.*** (Psalm 98: 9).

Joy to the world! The Savior reigns... He rules the world with truth and grace. At Christmas we don't just celebrate His first coming, but we look forward in anticipation to when He will come again. He has already dealt with sin, but when He returns the curse of sin will be forever removed.

Our response this Christmas is to ***Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him*** (Psalm 98:1). As we celebrate this Christmas may we shout for joy to the Lord. May we *prepare Him room* and share the *glories of His righteousness and the wonders of His love.*



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Territorial Women's Ministries Department

Commissioner Colleen Riley—
Territorial President
of Women's Ministries

Colonel Genevera Vincent—
Territorial Secretary
for Women's Ministries

Major Beth Desplancke—
Territorial Women's Ministries
Program Secretary



Flourishing in Relationships: Conversation Starters

Take time to celebrate the Christmas season with friends and family and use these questions to guide your conversations.

- ◆ What is your favorite Christmas memory?
- ◆ Christmas isn't Christmas without what? What are the musts that simply have to be a part of your celebration of Christmas?
- ◆ What are some family traditions that you have incorporated into your Christmas celebration?
- ◆ The spiritual discipline of celebration is celebrating the goodness of God. How have you seen God's goodness in your life this past year?
- ◆ What are key events from this past year that you want to celebrate?
- ◆ What are you looking forward to celebrating in the coming year?
- ◆ Besides major holidays, how can you incorporate the spiritual discipline of celebration into the regular rhythms of your walk with Jesus?

“Through the faith practice of celebrating, we delight in circumstances, relationships, and occasions that help us remember and anticipate God’s abundant goodness, creativity, faithfulness, beauty and love.” Chris Schoon

Additional Resources

Check out our website for more resources to help you flourish in the dry season:

<https://usw-womensministries.org/>

Bible Study: *The Lamb Who Was Slain*, a study on Exodus 12 by Captain Victoria Mercer.

Blog: Major Beth Desplancke challenges us to consciously “find joy” in all our activities.

Devotional: *Celebration of God’s Promises* by Captain Felicia LeMar.

Craft Idea: Holiday Centerpieces by Major Jasiel Tumale.

Christmas Ornament Prayers

As we take time to celebrate the season we can use the ornaments on the Christmas tree as reminders to pray for others.

Handmade We all have ornaments that have been lovingly made by your kid, grandkid, niece, nephew, etc. Take the time to pray for the person who made that handmade ornament for you.

Location Often an easy souvenir to pick up on your travels is to buy a Christmas ornament. We have an ornament for every place we have lived. When you see those location ornaments, pray for those family and friends that still live there. If it was a vacation spot, perhaps look up a Christian ministry in that area that you can pray for. Pray that the love and light of Jesus will be shared in that location.

Special If you have an ornament that grandma gave you, every time you see that ornament this Christmas season, pray for grandma. If grandma is gone, spend time praying to God and thanking Him for the impact grandma had in your life. If you have ornaments that have been given to you by others, it is natural to pray for the person who gave you the ornament. If that person is no longer alive, pray and thank God for the impact that person had on your life.

Specific We all have people that the Lord has laid on our hearts to pray for specifically that might not fit in any of the other categories. Take a plain plastic ornament and write those names and needs on it with a sharpie and then hand the ornament in front.

Every time you enjoy your beautiful Christmas tree, be intentional to take the time to pray for all those people represented.



Add reading of the Word daily as part of your Christmas celebration.

Flourishing in the Word

Celebrate this Christmas by reading the Biblical narrative of the birth of Jesus. These passages are familiar, so perhaps try something new. Read from a different Bible translation than you normally use. Or read the Scripture aloud or listen to a bible app that will read the Scripture to you. Close your eyes and truly listen to the words.

Dec 1	Luke 1:1-17	Dec 17	Micah 5:1-5
Dec 2	Luke 1:18-25	Dec 18	Luke 2:8-20
Dec 3	Isaiah 9:1-7	Dec 19	Luke 2:21-40
Dec 4	Luke 1:26-33	Dec 20	John 1:1-9
Dec 5	2 Samuel 7:12-16	Dec 21	John 1:10-18
Dec 6	Luke 1:34-38	Dec 22	John 3:16-21
Dec 7	Matthew 1:18-25	Dec 23	Galatians 4:1-7
Dec 8	Isaiah 7:10-14	Dec 24	Romans 6:20-23
Dec 9	Luke 1:39-45	Dec 25	1 Timothy 1:15-17
Dec 10	Luke 1:46-56	Dec 26	Titus 3:3-7
Dec 11	Luke 1:57-66	Dec 27	Matthew 2:1-12
Dec 12	Luke 1:67-80	Dec 28	Psalms 72:9-11
Dec 13	Genesis 12:1-3	Dec 29	Isaiah 60:1-6
Dec 14	Matthew 1:1-17	Dec 30	Matthew 2:13-18
Dec 15	Isaiah 11:1-5	Dec 31	Matthew 2:19-23
Dec 16	Luke 2:1-7		

Flourishing Ideas from the Territory

Centralia, WA made Financial Planning Binders.

Coeur d'Alene, ID is doing a study, "Encountering God Bible Study" by Kelly Minter.

Fort Collins, CO had a tea party and each table was uniquely decorated. The cheesiest table was the Chuck E. Cheese table complete with a Chuck E. Cheesecake.

Kauluwela, HI did a book study, *Grace in the Wilderness* focusing on 1 Peter.

Lewiston, ID ladies held a house warming party for corps family who had been living in a hotel for 5 years. The ladies and the rest of the corps all purchased new gifts for the family's home!

Northwest DHW held a Chili Cook-Off Competition.

The ladies in **Rita, Marshall Islands** made curtains for the children's ward of the hospital as they learned to sew. When the curtains were finished, they planned an outing to the hospital to give them the curtains and then they visited the mothers in the maternity ward, praying for the patients, nurses and doctors.

Spokane, WA worked with an organization that came to give away brand new bras to the shelter and social services clients.

Tacoma, WA had a Dinner & Divas night. They all dressed up and went out for a meal together.

Vancouver, WA started a monthly Brunch Bunch where ladies meet off site for fellowship and a meal.

Joyous Christmas Worship

The point of the spiritual discipline of celebration is to rejoice in God's goodness in our lives. It is choosing to see how God is working in our lives, noticing evidence of His love and presence. It is about finding joy in God no matter what is going on around us.

An easy way to incorporate joy and celebration into the Christmas season, is to listen to Christmas music that focuses on the Who we celebrate during this time— Jesus, Our Savior.

Research shows that music gives our brains a boost and improves cognitive function and happiness. In all the hustle and bustle that this holiday season holds for each of us, spend time consciously choosing to listen to Christmas music that brings us joy, puts a smile on our faces, and perhaps even causes us to dance.

Don't just use Christmas music as background filler or white noise, but schedule times throughout your busy days to consciously listen and enjoy the sounds of the season. This may mean scheduling a dance break amidst all the holiday activities. Or perhaps taking time after dinner to sing a carol as a family around the dinner table. Or every time you park your car, make the deliberate decision to remain in my car (and not immediately hop out) and simply pause and listen to one complete song (whether one that happens to be playing on the radio, or one of your favorites on your *Spotify* list.

Whenever your Christmas spirit begins to wane, choose to celebrate by turning up the Christmas music and worshipping the Lord!



But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11



7 Simple Ways to Celebrate Christ at Christmas

1. Attend a Christmas Eve or Christmas Day Church Service
2. Choose Christmas cards that speak of Jesus and the true meaning of Christmas.
3. Display a Nativity scene in your home. Have several? Put them in each room of your house so you can see the reason we celebrate.
4. Plan a project of service for Christmas. Volunteer at The Salvation Army standing at a kettle, boxing food for food boxes, buying a toy for a child on the Angel Tree.
5. Say “Merry Christmas” instead of “Happy Holidays.”
6. Thank God for the gift of His Son Jesus (John 3:16) as you purchase, wrap and open gifts this season.
7. Write a Christmas letter to a missionary, thanking them for their service to the Lord.