

Foil they foes with JOY Rev. Ross Varney, Dec.17, 2023

This is the Sunday of the candle of JOY. The early Christians didn't want the entire season of Advent to be waiting and hoping. It's kind of like when Jesus said, "you will always have the poor with you; but celebrate when you can, now, when the bridegroom is right here with you." The state of our world brings up these thoughts also; there are so many to help, so many poor or sick or grief-stricken...that how can we speak of JOY? The Ceremony of Carol sung by the Newburyport Choral Society last week has a song that speaks of Joy of Jesus being so powerful that it can indeed "foil ones foes." Just as one candle is strong enough to lighten a dark room. Spiritual masters often said that singing causes the devil to flee. Amidst days of sorrow, somehow we still can celebrate having some figgy pudding; we can still sing some upbeat Christmas Carols. We still can celebrate the babe who became the wonder of the world, knowing the wonders he did, and still can do. We celebrate not only his birth, but a life full of miracles and resurrection spirit. I was interviewed this past week by the radio show called "Lifting Your Spirit." It is an interfaith program, led by a Rev. Joel Grossman, and meditation teacher Ted Jones. Since one is Jewish and one seems to be mostly Buddhist, I was felt obliged to explain things about Advent and Christmas. I talked about the lovely Christmas Eve circle that we make, passing the candlelight one to the next. I noted that while Christians call Jesus the light of the world (John 1... and the Light came into the world, and the darkness has not put it out), it is amazing that Jesus said to his followers in the Sermon on the Mount, "YOU are the light of the world and the salt of the earth." This the meaning of what we call the "incarnation," not only God coming in the flesh in Jesus, but God coming to dwell inside all of us... if we are open and willing. Thus the potential for all those God-qualities like peace, love, and Joy *is in all of us!* So during Christmas season, it is good to keep asking, what gives me joy? What lifts my spirit? Surely the spirit of **children** lifts our spirits. The sheer energy of

children shows excited engagement with life. So much anticipation and eagerness for the new things of life! And we adults love seeing the new things... the first steps taken, the first words spoken, the first crush or best friend! Churches have always liked children in our Christmas pageants. Children always do some unexpected or funny things. I know that the children were why my Dad loved being an elementary school principal. He could have been host of the TV show "Kids say the darnedest things." They would tell him their favorite silly jokes while waiting in line for the school bus! Speaking of silly jokes, laughter and a good sense of **humor** is surely the gift of Joy. In a way it is very Christlike, in that humor often has to do with the vulnerability of humans; we are in the flesh, we are fallible and make mistakes. I often say that it's a good thing when something goes wrong in a wedding. The wrong song is played at the first dance, a word in the vows is changed by mistake, the flower girl dances down the aisle and gets all the attention! Poking fun at oneself, is accepting our own vulnerability, that we are spirit that dwells in mortal human flesh. Some would add little **pets** to the experience of Joy! Rev. Joel is a hospice chaplain and he told me even with people Page of 2 3 Foil they foes with JOY Rev. Ross Varney, Dec.17, 2023 who have advanced dementia, if you show them a video of kittens or puppies, they usually light up and smile! Puppies and kittens, like little children, are playful! They bring smiles and laughter; they bring Joy! The **Food** of a holiday season can bring joy. Jesus was often feasting with friends; so favorite foods and sweets are surely a good way to celebrate. I know that my sister tries to replicate some of my mother's best recipes, from sausage crepes to frosted cookies. Certain foods can remind us of certain people; it is as if they are present here with us! The **music** of this season is a key example of the Joy we celebrate this time of year. The other day, I was having breakfast with Norm. While waiting for the meals to come, I went to the piano to play a few carols (I was playing mostly the mellow ones and the religious ones!) ... and when I came back, at the nearby table, everyone was singing Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer! And one Jewish fellow who I

knew, started singing an upbeat Chanukah song! For us, Christ is the One who brings us hope, peace, love and joy, liberating us from sin and separation that creeps into our lives. But the incarnation, Divine Spirit becoming flesh, shows us that his spirit really is universal... just as Joy with Children, with pets, with music, is a universal experience. So let's "Repeat the sounding Joy", let's "Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel ... has come to us, oh Israel!" Let's poke fun at times, let's laugh and sing, for the birth of Jesus is Joy to the World! Page of 3 3