



Advent #2

Joy sustains through costly obedience

w/c 7 December 2025

"Joy bursts in our lives when we go about doing the good at hand and not trying to manipulate things and times to achieve joy." (C S Lewis)

To obey and follow God's calling brings us directly to a paradox. On one hand we are told that it is God who brings the change and develops our qualities (for example, Galatians 5:22 – including joy). On the other hand, Paul makes it clear that – for the sake of the Gospel – we are to strive, to work, to labour. The writer to the Hebrews instructs us to **"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy"** (12:14). A phrase also used by both Paul and Peter on several occasions in their letters. How do we balance the two sides of this conundrum?

Read Micah 5:1–4

Micah is writing into a world of uncertainty. A place not unlike our experience today. We see terror and danger yet hope for security and peace. Micah though brings God's promise to act in unexpected ways. We are invited to look for God where we may not expect him, to see him in the poor and vulnerable. What should we be looking for this Christmas?

Though born in Bethlehem, Jesus was known throughout his ministry as being "of Nazareth". One carried the prophetic halo we see in Micah, the other could be written off – even by a prospective follower of Jesus: *"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"* (John 1:46). Think through the various reasons why it might be that today we not reflect on 'Jesus of Bethlehem'?

A birth in Bethlehem marks out Jesus' association with David. Why is it important that Jesus is seen (Luke 2:4) as being of the *"house and line of David"*?

Read Matthew 1:18–25

While Matthew gives us almost nothing between the events around the annunciation and Jesus' birth, Luke provides a far fuller narrative. This includes Mary's initial answer to the angel – *"Let it happen to me as you've said."* (Luke 1:38 from Tom Wright's translation). How can we make this our daily prayer? How too do we discover the question God is asking of us? This will not normally be words spoken by an angel! What insight on this do we gain from Paul's words to the Ephesians (2:10): *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*?

The greatest expression of Mary in response to her calling is the song which we nowadays know as the Magnificat; see Luke 1:46–55. Read it through and discuss whether you see it as a purely personal response for her alone or as something which ought to form a manifesto for our Christian living today?

A final thought: what specifically does Joseph's response to the angel say to us today?

"Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing!"

(John Wesley)