***Isaiah 9:3-5 You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You  
According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. 4For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. 5For every warrior’ssandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire.***

This week, we lit the Advent candle of Joy. What a wonderful word – Joy! Advent is a time for us to stop and consider what our Faith really means. Is it just church on Sunday morning or is it Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love found beyond this world in Jesus?

Recall with me the Christmas mornings when you were a child. When I was a boy, I’d wake up on Christmas morning and wait expectantly in the dark, waiting in Hope that I’d hear the first movement from Mama and Daddy downstairs. A creak of a floorboard, the squeak of a door, and all of us children would start down that curving staircase. Oh, the Hope, the Joy as Mama sat at the foot of the tree passing gifts, while Daddy sat and watched, hands folded with a look of Peace I didn’t often see on my Father’s face. And there was Love in that room, as paper tore to reveal gifts we’d so long hoped to receive. The Joy wasn’t just in what we got, but in the people that gave as well. Jesus gave the gift of Salvation, but our True Joy is found in our relationship with our God, through His Son.

Verse 3 of our scripture begins - *You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy;* Isaiah confirmsGod has given increase to the nation of Israel, having the idea that God has magnified the Jews above all nations. How can a nation be more honored and magnified than to have the Savior of the world come from it? Jesus is Joy for all people, good tidings of great joy, Christ the Lord. The verse continues - *They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest,* All people will rejoice before You according to the harvest. The Joy of the harvest was a time of great celebration in ancient times, the time of reaping the fruit of the yearlong labor, a time to enjoy what was received. Unlike today, a successful crop literally meant life for the year to come. The verse ends - *As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.* Joy came from harvest, butJoy came as well when a battle was won, and the spoil was divided. The conquering nation rejoiced. These descriptions in Isaiah’s day would have made perfect sense to those listening. Like we associate the joy of Christmas morning with some of the most joyful times of our lives, the listeners would associate the Joy of the coming Messiah with the rejoicing at harvest and the rejoicing when victorious armies returned laden with riches.

Verse 4*For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian.*The yoke of man’s burden You have broken. Sin is slavery. Sin separates us from God. True freedom is found only in the Son – when He sets us free, we are free indeed. Christ says *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* Take My yoke. What does that tell us? There was a different yoke, heavy and burdensome, on us when we arrived at Jesus feet. He removes the rod of the oppressor, Satan, as in the day of Midian. Now, we recall Judges 7 that God freed Israel from the terror of 135,000 Midianites warriors with just 300 men. Only God can conquer 135,000 with 300. And only God can change the sadness of the Cross into the Joy of eternal Salvation.

Verse 5 *For every warrior’ssandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire.* Isaiah is communicating here that the confusion, chaos, and violence of battle will give way to peace. Garments will be used to fuel campfires. The nation will enjoy a time of tranquility. Weapons of violence will be destroyed. Isaiah 2:4 *He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.* In the end, there will be the Joy of absolute Peace.

This week, let all Joy be found in the Promise of Jesus’ return. Let’s really consider, meditate upon what this Season means. The people and possessions of this world are destined to disappoint. Our lasting Joy lives through Faith, in Hope waiting to be Present with our Lord. In this Christmas season, let us look expectantly upward, believing in the return of the Messiah, waiting in Joy for the appearance of our Savior.