***John 3:29-31He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. 30He must increase, but I must decrease. 31He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.***

This morning, we lit the candle of Joy. We find great Joy in the Hope of the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. He came in His First Advent to provide a way for Salvation. On the day of His birth, we remember the angel brought good tidings of great joy We look forward to His Second Advent when He will come again in the cloud - the Shechinah cloud of great power and glory. Just as He was taken away in Acts chapter 1, He will come again.

This morning, we’re with John the Baptist as he baptizes on the other side of the Jordan. There’s been a dispute and John uses this moment to exalt Jesus and who Jesus is. In verse 28, John says - *You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.* I am not the Christ. I’m preparing the way. I’ve been set apart and sent out to prepare the way. Likewise, we are preparing the way. We’re set apart and sent out by God to show others the way to salvation.

Verse 29 *He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.* Remember, we’re early in the ministry of Jesus. John says something very prophetic here – He identifies Jesus as bridegroom and the church as His bride. Revelation 19:7 says – *Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”* Revelation 22:17 says – *And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.* Jesus is our living water.John is not the bridegroom, but the close confidant, the friend of the bridegroom. John no doubt heard of the miracle of Jesus at the wedding feast. He’s no doubt heard of Jesus cleansing the Temple. John is overjoyed that Christ, the Bridegroom, is bringing the opportunity of reconciliation between God and man to all men. He's making Salvation available. John’s Joy is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God has come. He was sent to prepare the way for the Lamb of God and he’s seeing his purpose fulfilled.

Verse 30 *He must increase, but I must decrease.* Jesus must increase, but John must decrease. This sums up our life in Jesus. John realizes his work is almost done. The Messiah is known. His ministry was to point the way to Jesus. His whole life was about magnifying Jesus. Earlier in John 3, John’s disciples say – all men are coming to Him! John doesn’t miss a beat. I am not the Christ. No jealousy. No envy. No pride. Only Jesus.

Likewise my friends, we must decrease that Christ may increase. Self must decrease that Spirit might increase. Our ministry is not about us. Our ministry is about magnifying Jesus, glorifying God. Our Joy is made complete as others hear the word. We, as His bride, the church, stand and hear Him, rejoicing in Him always. As we release our pride and draw nearer to Him, we understand our only Joy comes in serving Him. Many fill their lives with activity and things, focused on pride and being magnified in this world. It’s only when we decrease that Christ will increase in us. We cannot serve two masters – the world or Jesus – one or the other is increasing.

Verse 31, John finishes - *He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.* John is saying - This is fitting. He who comes from above is above all. He is infinite and infinitely greater than any person. This is right. This is necessary. John finds great joy in the fact that more people are finding Christ. Even as he fades, he celebrates the magnification of the Kingdom of God. He who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. But He who comes from heaven is above all. We know Jesus came from above and we know He will come again from heaven. We wait in Faith, Hope, and Joy for His appearing.

This week, let’s consider – Self or Spirit. Which is increasing? Who is our life magnifying? What is the story that our bank statement or our event calendar tells? Rest assured – They tell stories. The Bridegroom is standing at the door. His return is drawing near. His Bride, the church, awaits. We know Jesus will come again from heaven in the clouds to gather us home. What a Joy that will be. John found Joy in decrease leading to Christ’s increase. May we find great Joy, as we wait for the Savior, decreasing in our Self that Spirit might grow. May we look up and lift up our heads. Our Redeemer draws near. May we rejoice and find Joy as we fulfill Christ’s calling in our lives. May Jesus find us waiting and ready, working and watching, when He returns to take us home.