

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Can you remember Christmases from long ago? Christmas is a time of nostalgia. Our attics, smart phones, and social media accounts are filled with memories from past Christmases. It can be fun to go down memory lane as you look at old pictures or watch old videos.

Sometimes, we even try to recreate moments that brought us joy in Christmas past. We still use our favorite childhood Christmas traditions. We make the same Christmas cookies that mom used to make. We try and decorate our homes the same way we did when we were young.

There is a place for such nostalgia. But nostalgia might also reveal deeper struggles taking place within our heart. We live in a broken world. Life can be hard. And so we use nostalgia—recalling the joy of Christmas yesteryear—in our effort to forget about current problems. That approach can give us some joy...until December 26th. Friends, if our joy this holiday season is found only by looking backward—remembering fond days of Christmases past—then our joy will be fleeting. Nostalgia cannot help you to rejoice always. To rejoice always, you need to look forward, not backward.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Philippians 4:4-5

God gave us a gift that helps us to look forward, the gift of his own Son in human flesh. Jesus came to us—our “Immanuel,” God with us. God drew near to us on that first Christmas. He came to earth bearing the types of gifts which bring a joy that never fades.

Jesus drew near to conquer sin, death, and the devil for us. Jesus draws near to us still today in the waters of baptism and welcomes us into his family. Jesus draws near to us in his Word. He binds himself to us in promises he will never fail to keep.

Do you want to rejoice always? Then look forward. Because this same Jesus will draw near again, when he returns on the Last Day with a new heavens and a new earth created just for you.

There is joy to be found in our Christmas celebrations. But lasting joy is found only in Jesus. Rejoice in him always.

***Prayer:** O Immanuel, you are a God who is near us, with us, and one of us. Lead us to find our joy this Christmas first and foremost in you. And bless us also with those other smaller joys of the season—safe travels, good health, time with family and friends, and other gifts as you see fit. In Your name we ask it, Amen.*

(From the WELS)

...See you in worship.

Keep looking up because the Lord is always looking down – Psalm 121

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