

12 April 2026  
Easter 2

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Great Is Our Joy!”

Text: John 20:19-31; Acts 5:29-42; 1 Peter 1:3-9

*Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!*

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Easter is a season of joy. Not just one day, but *fifty* days we'll be singing Easter hymns and rejoicing. Christ is risen! How could we not?

Is that strange? Fifty days of joy? Some think so. That four, five, six weeks after Easter and all the chocolate is eaten and the decorations long put away and forgotten, we're still singing Easter hymns!

Maybe it is because joy is in such limited supply in our world today. This world of sin and struggle, of polarization and selfishness, of criticism and judgment. Some people cannot rejoice because they're always worried that bad news is right around the corner. They're always waiting for the other shoe to drop. People like that . . . I don't know if they're pessimists, realists, or have just led a hard life.

Joy seems to be hard for us. We want it . . . but maybe not too much? Don't get your hopes up so you won't be disappointed. People who seem to be perpetually joyful, we envy them. We want to be like that. What do they have that we don't?

**Jesus.**

But not just “Sunday Jesus.” Everyday Jesus. Every moment Jesus. Triumphant, resurrected, cannot die again, Jesus. Psalm 30 says, *Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning* (v. 5b). That doesn't mean sleep it off! The morning there is the morning of the resurrection. The morning of *the eighth day* that we are now living in - the day of eternity; the day that will never end. The day Jesus created with His resurrection. The old creation had seven days. Do you know how many days the new creation has? **One**. And it will never end.

So the Scriptures we heard today are filled with joy. This is, by the way, one of the reasons why I think the message of the Apostles was so contagious and successful.

That when they went out and preached, they were filled with joy! Yes, it was the Word of God and yes, it was the work of the Spirit. But I believe this, too: **joy**. Joy which is the second gift of the Spirit after love. The joy they preached is the joy they lived. It wasn't just a job. They weren't just slogging through it. They couldn't wait to tell others. And that was noticed. People wanted that. If Christians are just grumpy, judgmental people . . . why do that? Why would I want that? I have enough of that in my life! But joy, that I need! Where can I find that?

**Jesus.** Joy comes with the morning. *His* morning.

So it was in the Holy Gospel we heard today. Sunday morning had come and gone, but the Son had not yet risen on the disciples. They were still in the darkness of sin and death, captive to their fears behind locked doors and windows. But when Jesus came to them - body and blood Jesus, resurrected Jesus, who ***showed them His hands and side*** - they were filled with joy. Now, the English translation we heard today said, ***they were glad when they saw the Lord***. Really? NO! The word for *glad* there is *rejoiced*! They rejoiced! They whooped it up! Their joy burst out of them! And then, I think *after* things settled down a little, Jesus said to them, *Now go give this same joy to others*.

Which they tried to do with their friend, Thomas. But Thomas was still stuck. The Son had not yet risen on him. He would not, could not, believe. *Until the eighth day* . . . You think it an accident or a coincidence that John writes that? He could have said the next week, or a week later, or something like that. But he writes that it was eight days later. The eighth day. The new day. The day the Son rose on Thomas and gave him joy.

We heard of this joy also in the first reading from Acts. The disciples were out and about in Jerusalem, and specifically in the Temple, preaching Jesus and telling everyone of their joy - Jesus' resurrection! And for this they were beaten. The Jewish leaders were flummoxed. They didn't know what to do. But at least they could beat the joy out of the Apostles. Except they couldn't! ***[The Apostles] left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name***. Their joy could not be contained or beaten out of them. ***Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ***.

And then Peter wrote about this joy in the Epistle. Peter who was one of those beaten that day by the Jewish leaders. We have been ***born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead***, he says. Born again into the eighth day, the new creation, the day of never-ending life. And ***in this you too rejoice***, he says, ***even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been***

*grieved by various trials*. No rose-colored glasses. No blind optimism here. Peter knows life is rough and tough. The Christians and churches he is writing to have been enduring suffering and persecution. But their joy surpasses, supersedes that and remains. And so, he continues, ***though you do not now see [Jesus], you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. Joy comes with the morning***; when the Son rises upon you.

So there's joy all over the place in our Scripture for today! So . . . what so often takes *our* joy away? For the Son has risen upon us. We are baptized into the eighth day, the day of the new creation, the day of eternal life. So this joy is ours. So what happened to it? Where is it for you? What has taken it away?

Well, many things, I'm sure. One is, perhaps, when we become preoccupied, obsessed with the things of this world that cannot give us joy - not a true and lasting joy anyway. Success, acceptance, achievement, popularity. Maybe we're happy for a bit, but then the next hurdle, the next challenge comes, and we're back down in the slog.

Or maybe for you it's fear. Fear of failure. Fear of what others will do to you. Fear of your sins being found out. Or maybe this world and life has beaten it out of you. But it couldn't be beaten out of the Apostles . . . so what are we missing? What have we forgotten? How has the devil deceived us and misled us away from where true joy is found?

Perhaps it is because we confuse *happiness* and *joy*. One of the best explanations I've heard of the difference between those two things is that happiness *comes from without*, from the things around us being as we want them. So when the things around us go south, go wrong, change, and aren't as we hoped, our happiness also goes away. But *joy comes from within*. Joy isn't dependent on whether other people and things are good and right and are as I want. Joy has a different source . . .

## **Jesus.**

We can't conjure up joy within us, but it can be given to us. As I said earlier, joy is the second of the gifts of the Spirit listed by Paul. So true joy is a gift from God. Which explains why the Apostles could be joyful even when beaten, and those early Christians could rejoice even in the face of suffering and persecution. The Son had risen upon them. They knew Jesus had triumphed over sin and death and all evil. Their sins are forgiven. You can kill me, but you can't take my life! There's a freedom in being able to say that. A joy, a confidence, that can only come from Jesus.

So when we confuse happiness and joy, we pursue joy the wrong way. We can end

up pursuing happiness instead of joy *and miss both*. So rather than trying to have everything around us just right and how I want it, and so being happy for a moment, until the next problem arises that takes that happiness away . . . rather than focusing on those things which I maybe can or cannot control . . .

### ***Jesus.***

He comes and brings His joy, His triumph, His resurrection, His new creation, His forgiveness, His life, His Spirit, and raises you up. You are my child, *and nothing can change that*. Your sins are forgiven, *and nothing can change that*. I love you, *and nothing can change that*. Here is My Body, My Blood, My life and salvation, *and nothing can change that*. You are mine, *and nothing can change that*. Think that might give you a joy different than happiness? That cannot be taken away?

So even when you suffer as a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, or wife . . . even when you suffer for doing good, for fulfilling your vocation, for being faithful . . . even when a sinful world comes crashing down on you, when you wish things were different, when you have that aching pain that never seems to go away - in your body or in your heart - *you can rejoice!* Peter says. Not because its easy or pleasant - I'm sure the Apostles left the Jewish leaders that day they were beaten in great pain. But as Luther wrote in a hymn, *And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, though these all be gone, our victory has been won; the Kingdom our remaineth* (LSB #656 v. 4). You have what they cannot take away . . .

### **Jesus.**

The devil tried. The world tried. Death tried. And they all failed. Jesus rose from the dead! And because He did, the victory is ours. And that joy is greater than a championship parade for a victorious team, winning a gold medal, the joy of when World War 2 ended, or any other joy you can think of. And when you think of it that way . . . *fifty days?* That's not long *enough!* We need longer than that! And we will have longer. An eternity to rejoice in Jesus and His love.

*Let us sing praise to Him with endless joy;  
Death's fearful sting He has come to destroy.  
Our sin forgiving, alleluia! Jesus is living, alleluia!* (LSB #466 refrain)

So if your joy doesn't seem endless but absent, don't look to yourself or to others to give you what you need. It's here. In Jesus. Eat it, drink it, read it, hear it, splash around in it! And then take this joy with you. Back home, back to work, back to school. And when others wonder what's in you? What's gotten to you? You know what to say . . .

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!* **[He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]**

How can I *not* be joyful?

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.