

Zoe.

Zoe is two and a half. She loves to jump. She jumps off the sofa. She jumps off the bed. She jumps off the chair. She jumps off the stairs. She jumps off the deck. She jumps off the park bench. She runs and jumps. She skips and jumps. She jumps on the grass. She jumps on the road. She jumps on the concrete.

When Zoe jumps, she is often laughing and saying ... jumping.

This is joy.

This is joy for her grandparents too.

It is proclaimed today by the prophet Isaiah. Salvation is coming, unearned it comes. To everyone, the good and not so.

This is joy.

Healing for the broken hearted, rejoicing in that healing. Freedom for the captive, the poor will be abundantly rewarded. Comfort for the mourning and strength of spirit for a renewed life.

A change of clothes, from funeral grab to silk and perfume. Blessings so great, praise will abound.

The gift of a new name. To those who are homeless, helpless, rootless in the world, their lives firmly planted in the earth.

To those who don't even realise, God loves, and comes to them in mercy.

This is joy.

A man becomes a Christian. The struggle has been long. It started many years ago, but deviated. Eventually it dragged him back. He fought it at every step, but it was too strong. It kept coming, relentlessly. Through his thoughts. His friends. His life. He was the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.

CS Lewis wrote these things in his memoir years later, the book he called "Surprised by Joy."

Lewis found an unearned gift. A change of clothes. A new name. A place to plant his feet in the earth.

This is joy.

One of my friends has a theory about the end. When this life is all wrapped up for everyone. He says we will be sitting around for the first millennia watching God at work. He sees the world's stadiums filled with people, watching other people be made whole and full. All of us becoming how we were intended to be.

All sickness and disease dried from us like tears on a hanky. All pain and frailties falling away like a gown at bedtime. All cancers and traumas taken from us like the weights we were never meant to carry. All of this world's afflictions finally put right. Every single human being brought into the fullness of life. Physically. Emotionally. Intellectually, and Spiritually.

That for the first millennia we will simply rejoice, as we see one another made whole and full.

This he says, will be joy.

Joy, a gift given to us, as children. Children understand joy. Jumping is joy. Unfortunately, somewhere, somehow, we lose that gift.

In Jesus birth, death and resurrection, we find the promises of the prophet as joy restored. We find an unearned and undeserved gift. Liberty for our souls and freedom from that which oppresses us. Our broken hearts healed and liberty proclaimed to us.

We find a change of clothes and a new name; a home and a place to plant our feet. Even if we don't realise it, at Advent, God comes to us in mercy.

This is joy.

When all this is wrapped up, it will no longer be in part, but total.

Everything healed.

Everything free.

Everything released.

Everyone released, made whole and full as we were meant to be.

This will be joy.

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When Zoe jumps, she is often laughing and saying ... jumping.

This is joy ... and it will be everlasting.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.