

Sermon Title: **Joy - As a Witness to Testify to the Light**

Bible: **Isaiah 61:1-4 & John 1:6-8, 19-28**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, December 13, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, your joy may be our joy. In the season of Advent, please guide us to look for your joy. Please help us to bring the good news to the oppressed. In this time, please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. PG-13 Message?

Before I start today's message, I would like to mention that this message might be rated PG-13. That's because I plan to share a story of the great-great grandfather of Santa Claus. Do you believe in Santa Claus? When I was young, I really wanted to hear "Ho ho ho, Merry Christmas!" from Santa Claus. And I wanted to say "Thank you, Santa Claus!" On many Christmas Eves, I tried to stay awake until the moment when Santa Claus visited my house. But I fell asleep, and I was not able to see the face of Santa Claus. However, on Christmas, I received the Christmas gifts that I wanted.

I heard that Santa Claus came down through the chimney. Because I lived in an apartment, there was no chimney. I wondered how Santa Claus stopped by my place. My parents told me that Santa Claus used the balcony, instead of a chimney, for the apartments. I remembered that I used to fall asleep near the balcony, not in the bedroom, while waiting for the coming of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve.

2. A Story of St. Nicholas

Fortunately or unfortunately, now I know who Santa Claus was and who brought my Christmas gifts. Do you know the origin of Santa Claus? Have you heard of St. Nicholas? His legendary habit of secret gift-giving might be the traditional model of Santa Claus. Among many stories, I would like to share a story. When Nicholas' parents passed away, he was told to distribute their wealth to the poor. One famous story is that he gave gold coins to three virgins for their dowry. At the time of Nicholas, around 300 A.D., dowry money brought by a woman to the husband at marriage was a common custom. But a man who had three daughters lost his wealth, and could not afford dowries for his three daughters. This meant that the three daughters were in big trouble, as they might remain unmarried or be forced to earn money. After hearing this story, Nicholas decided to help them secretly, in order to save them from the humiliation of accepting charity. At night, Nicholas threw a purse filled with gold coins through the window. So, the first daughter got married. Nicholas threw the second purse filled with gold coins again at night through the window. Then, the second daughter got married. When Nicholas tried to throw in the third purse of gold coins at night, the father of the daughters had stayed awake. The father caught Nicholas, and thanked him. Nicholas told the father not to tell anyone about the gifts. But we know this kind of secret gift-giving, and this secret gift-giving becomes a wonderful tradition of Christmas.

3. Third Sunday of Advent in Joy

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. The pink candle means joy. What is joy? What gives you joy? According to the prophet Isaiah, to bring the good news to those who are oppressed is the

joy! To bind up the brokenhearted is the joy! To proclaim liberty to the captives is the joy! To comfort all who mourn is the joy! To repair ruined cities is the joy! In our community and our world, there are the oppressed, the brokenhearted, the captives, those who mourn, and ruined cities. Yes, in our world, there is suffering, tears, and brokenness. But it is not the end of the story. It is not the whole story. There is darkness. However, there is a light--the light!

4. Our Joy - Testifying to the Light!

In the season of Advent, many churches and organizations do Christmas toy gift giving. It is also our joy to do our own Christmas gift giving, even during this difficult time. As Nicholas helped the 3 daughters one by one, we can bring a Merry Christmas to a family in 2020. When the family receives our gifts, we will receive the joy! It is a characteristic of the light. The light is for them and for us, too. The light shines on all sides and everyone. The light brings joy! Just like John the Baptist, we are the witness of the light! We know the light. We have the light. And we follow the light! When we point to the light, some people might see our pointing hands only at first. They might not be ready to see the light yet. But it is the start. One Christmas, another Christmas. One gift, another gift. When we point to the light, one time, two times, and three times, more people can see the light. More people will be the witness of the light. That's because the light is still here and now.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, your light is in us. We cannot hide your light. Please use us to shine your light to others. Please pour out your love upon our church and the family we help. Your light brings joy to all of us. Thank you so much for your light and your joy! In Jesus' name. Amen.