

How Great Is Our Joy

David "waited patiently" as he cried unto the LORD (Psalm 40:1), who then lifted him "out of the slimy pit ... mud ... mire setting his "feet on a rock" (v. 2) — a great cause for JOY, this recounting of what the Lord's graciousness had provided. No wonder his next statement speaks of "a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God." (v. 3).

While this all sounds admirable, David later in the Psalm pleads, "Do not withhold your mercy from me, O LORD" (v. 11a). What happened between verse 3 and verse 11?

Circumstances.

How many of us have found ourselves like David waiting with a less-than-patient stance for the LORD, saying, "O my God, do not delay" (v. 11). Yet, also like David, we have found even more cause for joy when we learn that He is merciful enough to lift us "out of the pit" in spite of our having waited anxiously — rather than peacefully — for Him to act.

What a compassionate God we have! If we further follow the instructions the Lord gave His people through the prophet Zechariah, this, too, can add to our joy: "Show mercy and compassion to one another ... in your hearts do not think evil of each other" (7:9), for the law of reciprocity is a great one. This is illustrated in the parable of the talents included in today's reading (Matthew 11:2-15). Each servant was given proportionately to what he had done with what he had been given. So, here we see a balance with what we previously read: While God is so gracious and compassionate, He does require something of us. Yet the comparison of what He asks of us is small compared with what He has done and continues to do for each one of us.

Lastly, we see the joy that knows no end illustrated in Revelation with the angels, harps in hand, singing: "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power" How long? "Forever and ever!" a thing about which to be joyful, indeed!

Father, Your awesome majesty becomes real through the vivid image of the birth of our Savior at this time of year. Jesus came as a baby, grew to manhood, taught and inspired a few, then returned to Your side. Thank You, Father, for first sending Jesus, then returning the power of the Holy Spirit, that we would be inspired even today to draw close to You, to become one in the Spirit, to carry on what He began, to make Your joy and our joy complete. Amen.

~ Gina Stevenson
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While Shepherds Watched

*While shepherds watched their flocks by night
All seated on the ground
The angel of the Lord came down
And glory shone around, And glory shone around*

*"Fear not," he said,
For mighty dread had seized their troubled minds
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind, To you and all mankind."*

*"To you in David's town this day
Is born of David's line
The Savior who is Christ the Lord
And this shall be the sign,
And this shall be the sign."*

*"The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view displayed
And meanly wrapped in swathing bands
And in a manger laid, And in a manger laid."*

*Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of angels praising God, who thus
Addressed their joyful song,
Addressed their joyful song*

*"All glory be to God on high
And to the earth be peace;
Goodwill henceforth From heaven to men
Begin and never cease
Begin and never cease!"*