

A sermon preached in the series
How does a weary world rejoice?
We allow ourselves to be amazed.

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Luke 1:57-66
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Introduction

I am captivated by a good story. I've always been an avid reader. I'm drawn to how stories can transport us to entirely different worlds. These days, I enjoy stories across all kinds of media—movies, TV shows, books—as long as they hook me. The best storytellers are those who plant subtle clues early on, breadcrumbs that often go unnoticed the first time. But upon revisiting the story, these clues seem so obvious, woven seamlessly into the narrative. That's why I love the Gospel of Luke so much. It unfolds with such careful detail. We see this vividly in today's passage, the story of John the Baptist's birth and the amazement of his parents, neighbors, and relatives (Luke 1:57-66).

The theme of weariness is part of Advent stories

This sermon series, "How Does a Weary World Rejoice?", explores the weariness embedded in the Advent narrative. While we often focus on the joy of the season, underneath lies the deep weariness of waiting, hoping, and enduring.

Think of Elizabeth, a woman in the ninth month of a "geriatric pregnancy" (Luke 1:18, 36). Imagine her relatives and neighbors holding their breath, hesitant to rejoice in the miracle of her pregnancy until they're certain a healthy baby is born. This caution is understandable. At that time, childbirth was the leading cause of death for women, and infant mortality was heartbreakingly common. Joy often had to wait. Even after John's birth, Elizabeth faces frustration. When she declares the baby's name will be John, her neighbors dismiss her. "How could she know?" they likely thought. "It's not a family name." And every woman today sighs in weary understanding with Elizabeth (Luke 1:60-61).

Then Wonder enters the picture

But then, the story shifts. Wonder enters the narrative. Wonder and amazement are recurring themes in Luke's telling of the Advent and Christmas story. The people of Bethlehem are amazed by the shepherds' testimony (Luke 2:18). Mary and Joseph are amazed by Simeon's blessing at the temple. And here, in Luke 1:57-66, it's the friends and family of Zechariah and Elizabeth who are amazed. They marvel at Zechariah's agreement with his wife's unusual choice of name. They are even more amazed—and a little afraid—when Zechariah regains his speech after months of silence (Luke 1:63-64). Their amazement reframes the entire event. This is no ordinary birth. This is something beyond their understanding. "What then will this child become?" they wonder, unable to grasp that this baby would one day cry out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" (Luke 1:76; Isaiah 40:3).

The Candle of Joy and the Path Through Amazement

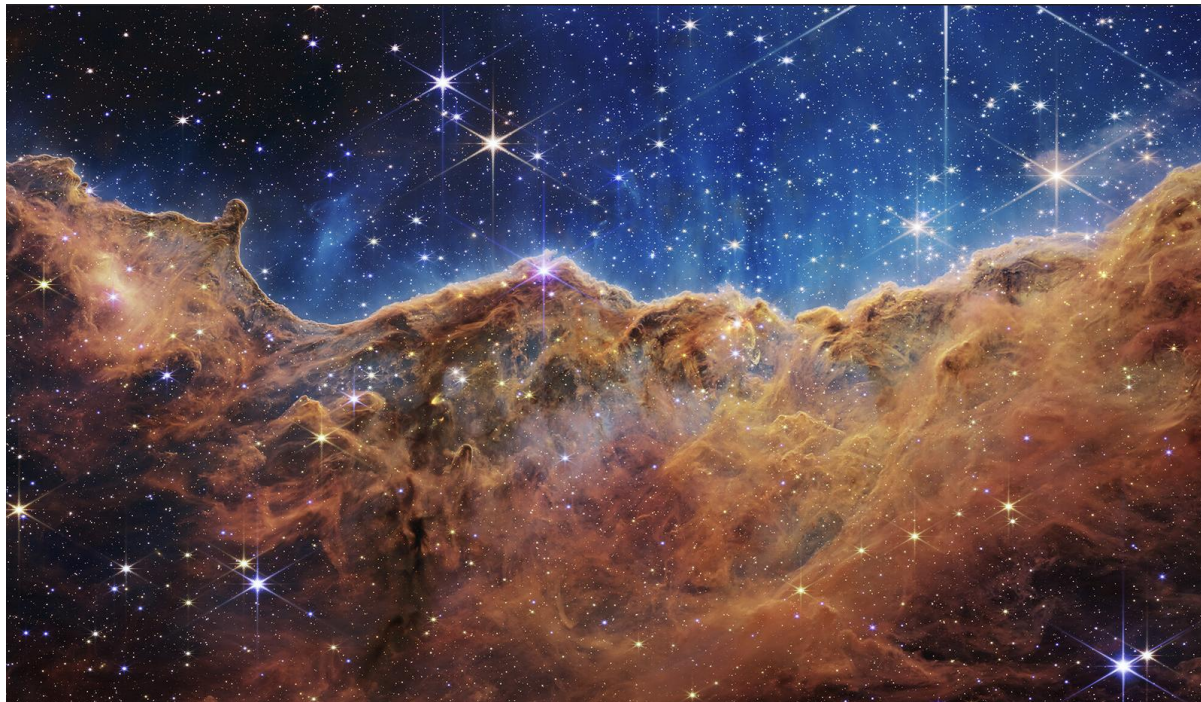
This week, we lit the candle of Joy, but joy can feel elusive in weariness. We can't simply snap

our fingers and shift from weariness to joy. Something must come in between, and that “something” is often amazement. Amazement is a choice. Two people can see the same thing, yet one is moved to wonder while the other remains indifferent. It’s all in how we choose to see.

One of the unexpected joys of this season for me has been watching Maya, my grand-toddler, experience Christmas. Last year, her first Christmas was exciting, but this year feels more magical. Maya is amazed by everything—Christmas trees, lights, ornaments, candy canes, even Santa Claus. In the dark mornings when the Christmas tree lights are turned on, Maya stands still, staring in awe at this glowing marvel in my son’s house. Seeing Christmas through her eyes reminds me of the wonder this season holds. Children have a way of drawing us back to amazement, helping us see the extraordinary in the ordinary (Matthew 18:3).

A Recent Example of Wonder: The James Webb Space Telescope

But we don’t need a small child in our lives to rediscover amazement. It’s there if we’re willing to look for it. A recent example of wonder that has captivated the world is the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). Launched in December 2021, the telescope has provided breathtaking images of galaxies, nebulae, and distant stars. These images, revealing the vastness and beauty of the universe in unprecedented detail, remind us of the intricate and awe-inspiring nature of creation (Psalm 8:3-4). Just as Zechariah and Elizabeth’s friends marveled at the miraculous birth of John, we too can marvel at the wonders that science and exploration reveal about God’s handiwork.



The Carina Nebula, NASA James Webb Space Telescope.

Finding Amazement in Everyday Life

For me, amazement is easily found in nature. I love a good sunset or sunrise, but my favorite is the alpenglow—that fleeting red glow on a snowy mountain at sunset.



Mt Rainer Wilderness by Scott Smorra

Living in the Pacific Northwest, we are surrounded by nature's beauty. We can either go about our days with our heads down, focused on our to-do lists, or we can slow down enough to notice and be amazed: the smell of rain, frost patterns on leaves, or even the intricate designs of our cities and the human ingenuity behind them (Psalm 19:1). When I get stopped in Christmas shopping traffic, I get more chance to study the human ingenuity of stop lights.

Amazement can be a balm for weary souls. It doesn't erase the struggles of life, but it offers relief, lightens heavy hearts and nudges us toward joy.

So, what inspires wonder and amazement in you? It might be different for each of us, and that's okay.

A mentor once told me that if you want to know what amazes someone, look at the photos on their phone. What do they capture? What sparks their joy? My own camera roll is filled with pictures of my children and grands, sunsets, mountains, and simple moments I don't want to forget. A friend's camera might have photos of squirrels, lakes, or migrating ducks. Another's might have quilts, fabrics, or finished projects. What would I see on your camera roll? What makes you stop, pull out your phone, and snap a picture because it brings you joy?

Closing Encouragement

Growing up, my parents insisted on taking family photos everywhere we went. The Brownie camera came out, we were ordered in line, pause and click. At the time, I found it annoying,

especially as a teenager. But now, I see what a gift they gave us. We have countless photos of family trips, simple backyard moments, and ordinary Saturdays. My parents were capturing what brought them joy: the eight of us kids.

If you hear anything from me today, hear this: look for wonder and amazement this week. If you feel weary and unsure how to enter into joy, start by opening your eyes to amazement. Slow down enough to observe, and let what you see lead you toward joy. For the weary: Joy doesn't erase weariness, but amazement has the power to reshape it—turning heavy burdens into moments of grace, one profound glimpse at a time.

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