

JOY

Inside Out Clip

When is a time you experienced joy?

I mean that pure, bubbling, cannot-contain-it joy.

Maybe what comes to mind for you is making that sports team or getting a part in the school play.

Maybe it's receiving that job offer or an acceptance letter.

Walking into a space that finally feels like yours.

Going on a date you didn't want to end.

Saying "I do" to your best friend.

Welcoming an adorable new pet into the family.

Finding out you're going to be a grandparent.

Hearing your doctor say you have a clean bill of health, or celebrating an important milestone in your recovery.

Maybe it's sitting down to your favourite meal, or laughing with a friend so hard you feel like you might pee your pants.

A moment of pure joy I remember happened years ago when my oldest was one, and I found out we were expecting again. Believe it or not—I was ecstatic. I felt adrenaline buzzing through me because I was so excited and joyful. I loaded Levi into his car seat and we drove straight to the nearest

OshKosh to buy a “brother” shirt to surprise my husband Aaron when he came home from work. I found a little shirt that said “*World’s Best Brother.*”

As I was purchasing it, the cashier said, “I’ve heard of people buying these for pregnancy announcements. Isn’t that so strange? I don’t get it at all.”

Meanwhile, that was exactly what I was doing.

But I was so overflowing with joy that her comment didn’t bother me.

That evening, I got to experience the moment I had been picturing: Aaron walking through the door, and little Levi toddling over to show off his new shirt—declaring himself a big brother. It was simple, beautiful, and full of pure joy.

Five weeks later, we learned the baby was not growing. A week after that, it was confirmed there was no heartbeat. We entered the painful, confusing journey of grieving our baby—navigating both the emotional heartbreak of what should have been and the physical toll on my body.

Four months later, we found out I was pregnant again with our son Jace. And as you can imagine, I did not experience that same pure, bubbling, cannot-contain-it joy.

There was no surprise shirt for Aaron.

No excited drive to OshKosh.

My heart was too sad from the last loss, and too afraid of another one.

I felt excitement for Jace, yes—but also guilt, fear, sadness, and even anger.

And maybe now you're thinking, What the heck, Ashley? This message was supposed to be joyful. To be happy!

But the truth is: joy and sorrow often share the same space, don't they?

I believe most of us know that tension.

Not necessarily through pregnancy loss, but through those moments where joy feels stolen.

Where you can't imagine returning to pure joy after everything you've experienced.

Where life feels too heavy to make room for joy.

Where even the thought of joy feels like a betrayal of what you've been through.

And I wonder if Mary ever wrestled with similar feelings.

Luke tells us:

"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David... He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there

was no guest room available for them."

—Luke 2:4-7

Mary was betrothed but not yet married and she was pregnant with a child. Can you picture the whispers and scandal in her small town? Surely this was not the joyful celebration she had dreamed of for her wedding, nor the way she imagined welcoming her first child.

She had to travel far from home, where there was no room for her. And instead of giving birth in the comfort of her own home and familiar surroundings, Jesus was born in a room meant for animals. His first bed was a manger. Designed to hold food for animals, not newborns.

This birth took place in discomfort, uncertainty, and vulnerability.

And yet Luke also goes on to tell us:

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

—Luke 2:19

This verse has always stopped me in my reading. It's such a poetic phrase, a beautiful glimpse into Mary's heart.

I don't think Mary treasured these things because they were easy, or because they were filled with pure, bubbling, cannot-contain-it joy. I think she treasured them because God was present in them.

As she carried baby Jesus, she also carried the questions, the sideways glances, the strain of trying to explain what could not be explained.

She carried the awe of feeling those first few kicks in her growing womb and the overwhelming wonder of holding her child for the first time. She held the tension of joy and hardship together.

And maybe that is the heart of joy.

Not happiness rooted in perfect circumstances, but something deeper.

A quiet strength that comes from our awareness of God's presence in the midst of it all.

The season of Advent invites us into that kind of joy.

Not because everything is perfect, not even because everything is good but because God is with us.

Immanuel - a name Jesus is given in the book of Matthew, means God with us.

With us in sorrow.

With us in fear.

With us in the waiting.

With us in uncertainty.

And with us in our happiness.

The joy of Christmas is that God was literally with us—in human flesh—feeling all the emotions, vulnerability, and fragility of being human. Jesus showed us how to embody joy throughout His life on Earth. He didn't embody the loud, bubbling joy, but a quiet strength grounded in His Father's presence.

So this Christmas, how do we respond like Mary—treasuring all these things and pondering them in our hearts? How do we take Jesus's example of living with joy in God's presence?

If joy comes easily to you this season, celebrate it.

Don't rush past it or downplay it. Thank God for it!

Savour that bubbling joy—let it rise up and spill over.

Let yourself smile without apologizing for it.

Let yourself laugh without wondering when the other shoe will drop.

Joy is a gift, and when it comes freely, receive it freely.

If this season feels heavy, like you are expected to be happy because its Christmas but you feel anything but,

try looking for quiet joy
the kind that doesn't shout or sparkle,
but hums underneath your days like a steady, grounding note.
The joy found in your resilience,
in the strength you didn't realize you had.
Find Christ's joy and strength in your astonishing ability
to keep going, keep loving, and keep believing through it all.
That too is holy joy.

Maybe this season feels complicated and you are holding a bucket load of
highs and lows.

Maybe your joy comes mixed with tears,
your laughter tangled with memories,
your gratitude wrapped in grief.

Maybe your heart feels pulled in two directions at once.

Celebrating what is good, while still aching over what has been lost.

Maybe your grief is knotted so tightly around your joy
that trying to separate them feels impossible.

If that's you, take a deep breath in this season and hear these words:

You do not need to untangle it for Jesus.

You don't need to sort your feelings into neat piles.

You don't have to present Him with only the polished pieces.

Jesus meets you in the middle of the mess.

In the mixed emotions, the tension, the ache, the wonder.

Ending Inside Out Clip: Keep ending picture on screen

Remember at the beginning of *Inside Out*, when Joy felt that Sadness was always getting in the way? Joy believed that, for Riley to truly experience joy, her memories all needed to be purely bubbling, cannot-contain-it happiness. But by the end of the film, Joy and Sadness discovered something deeper. Riley was healthiest and most whole when both of them worked together, creating memories that held layers of feeling, like the blue-and-yellow orb we see here.

Now, take a moment to recall a memory of your own that contains joy. It may be radiant and overflowing, or it may be joy woven together with other emotions.

Hold out your hands and picture yourself holding that memory, just as Joy and Sadness held Riley's. These are precious moments that you, like Mary, have treasured up and pondered in your heart.

Hold that memory gently as I pray.

God, thank you for these precious memories all around the room that are being held.

Help us to laugh when laughter comes,
to cry when tears rise,
to feel everything that asks to be felt.

And help us to be people who give others that same gift and permission.

Let this season be spacious enough to hold those emotions that seem to compete.

For both our joy and sorrow,
both celebration and lament,
both light and shadow.

because You are present in all of it.

Thank you for being a God who is with us.

Amen.