

Advent Reflections Through the Music of Earth, Wind, and Fire



Week 3: Joy - September & December

This week, we explore joy through two complementary perspectives: the joy rooted in remembering God's faithfulness (September), and the joy announced in our darkest moments (December). Both are essential for the Advent journey.

Opening Question: Do You Remember?



A Moment of Pure Joy

Take a moment to reflect on a time of pure, unfiltered joy in your life. Maybe it was a celebration, a breakthrough, a moment of connection, or an unexpected blessing. What was happening? Who was there? How did it feel?

Now, notice what happens in your spirit as you remember. Does something stir? Does your heart lift? Does hope begin to rise? That's the power of memory—it has the capacity to fuel our expectation and reignite our joy.

Today's exploration will help us understand how remembrance and announcement work together to sustain us through Advent and beyond.

Two Paths to Joy

September Joy

Joy Rooted in Remembering

This is joy that comes from looking back and seeing God's faithfulness throughout our journey. It's the joy of testimony, of recounting victories, of passing down stories. September joy says, "Do you remember?"

- Based on Rev. Terrance L. Thomas's reflection
- Grounded in Zephaniah 3:14-20
- Memory fuels expectation

December Joy

Joy Announced in Darkness

This is joy that finds us when we have no past victories to draw from. It's joy that arrives as an announcement from heaven when we're in the field, in the dark, just trying to survive. December joy says, "Do not be afraid!"

- Based on Rev. Elexis Wilson Thomas's reflection
- Grounded in Luke 2:8-10
- Announcement creates testimony

Some of us need to remember September. Some of us need to experience December. And sometimes, we're creating the December that will become someone else's September. Both perspectives are essential for understanding the fullness of Advent joy.

September: Sing Aloud, O Daughter Zion!

Zephaniah 3:14-20 (NRSVUE)

"Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more."

The Context of Memory

Zephaniah speaks to a people with memory. They remember Egypt's bondage and the Red Sea crossing. They remember manna in the wilderness and water from the rock. They remember David's courage and Solomon's temple. They remember God's faithfulness even when they themselves were faithless.

And that memory becomes both their indictment and their hope. It holds them accountable to what they know about God's character, but it also reminds them that the God who delivered them before can deliver them again.

The Three-Fold Faithfulness

The God who WAS faithful (remembrance): Looking back at what God has already done builds our spiritual foundation.

IS faithful right now (presence): Recognizing God's work in the present moment, even when we can't see the full picture.

WILL BE faithful (expectation): Trusting that the same God who showed up before will show up again.

Memory fuels expectation. When you remember what God has done, you can anticipate what God will do.

December: Good News of Great Joy

Luke 2:8-10 (NRSVUE)

"Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.'"

The Context of Darkness

The shepherds didn't have a joyful memory to draw from in that moment. They were literally and figuratively in the dark—marginalized, oppressed, overnight workers just trying to survive another shift. They weren't in the temple. They weren't among the religious elite. They were ordinary people doing ordinary work in extraordinary darkness.

But they became the memory that others would need. Their December experience became someone else's September testimony. The announcement they received would be retold for generations.

The Announcement, Not the Achievement

Notice what the angel didn't say. The angel didn't say "create joy" or "find joy" or "remember joy." The angel said "**I AM BRINGING YOU good news of great joy.**"

It's already in motion. Joy isn't something you have to manufacture or conjure up. Your only job is to believe it. The announcement precedes the feeling. Faith comes before the feeling follows.

Sometimes we're the ones remembering September, and sometimes we're creating the December that someone else will need to remember.

September People & December People

September People: Memory → Expectation

Characteristics:

- Have testimonies of God's faithfulness to share
- Remember when God showed up before
- Let memory fuel anticipation of what God will do next
- Keep the fire burning by rehearsing God's faithfulness
- Pass down stories generation to generation

The Challenge: We've lost our memories. We've stopped testifying. We've let our history with God collect dust. When memories fade, joy goes with them. We've become a people who no longer ask, "Do you remember?"

The Call: Memory is a spiritual discipline. Remembering is an act of resistance against despair. Rehearse God's faithfulness out loud. Let that memory set your hope on fire. Write it down. Speak it out. Pass it on.

December People: Darkness → Announcement

Characteristics:

- Are in the field, in the dark, in fear
- Don't have past victories to draw from
- Need the announcement more than the memory
- Joy finds them in their darkness
- Become the testimony others will remember

The Challenge: You're aware of what joy feels like in others, but when it's time to remember September, you keep finding yourself in December. You're in a place where joy can be seen but not felt. You watch others celebrate while you're still in the field.

The Call: Advent joy isn't about your ability to produce something. It's about your willingness to believe what heaven has already announced over your December. The joy is not waiting on you to feel it; it's waiting on you to believe it's here.

The Fire Element: Joy Spreads

Fire Can't Be Contained

Fire spreads. You can't contain it. One flame touches another and suddenly the whole room is lit. One spark jumps from branch to branch and the whole forest is ablaze. This is the nature of joy—it's contagious, transferable, unstoppable.



One Person's September

When you testify about God's faithfulness, you ignite hope in someone who's forgotten what God can do.



One Person's December

Your current struggle becomes someone else's September. The testimony you're living through now will fuel someone else's faith later.



One Testimony

Lights up a whole room. When one person speaks truth about what God has done, everyone present feels the warmth.



One Memory

Remembered out loud sets a congregation ablaze. Corporate memory creates corporate expectation.

The Sound of Fire Spreading

This is why enslaved Africans sang in the fields. Why freedom fighters sang in jail cells. Why our grandmothers hummed hymns while doing white folks' laundry. They remembered. And that memory ignited joy the oppressor couldn't extinguish.

The songs had no words sometimes—just sounds. "Ba-dee-ya" doesn't mean anything in particular, but it means everything. It's the sound of joy beyond words. It's the sound of celebration that can't be contained by language. It's fire spreading from heart to heart, voice to voice, generation to generation.

Discussion & Reflection Questions

1 Personal Identification

Are you a September person or a December person right now? Do you need to remember God's faithfulness, or do you need to hear the announcement that joy is coming? Be honest about where you are.

3 The Announcement in Darkness

Rev. Elexis says "The light found me in the midst of my darkness." Have you ever experienced a December moment where God showed up uninvited? Share that story with your group or write it down.

2 Memory as Spiritual Discipline

When was the last time you sat down and really remembered, in truth and transparency, what God brought you through? What stops you from testifying? What would it look like to make remembrance a regular practice?

4 False Memories & False Narratives

Rev. Terrance warns about "false memories—memories that aren't real, devoid of testimony and power." Why do we sometimes create false narratives about our past? How does romanticizing or minimizing our history rob us of authentic joy?

Joy for ALL People

The angel said "good news of great joy for ALL the people." How does this challenge our tendency to make joy exclusive or conditional? Who have we excluded from joy, and how can we extend the announcement to them?

Creating December for Others

"Our December becomes somebody else's September." How does your current struggle, your current testimony-in-the-making, have the potential to fuel someone else's hope later? How does this perspective change how you view your season?

Belief vs. Feeling

Rev. Elexis challenges us that joy isn't about feeling it, it's about believing it's here. How do we practice believing joy is present even when we don't feel it? What does it look like to act on the announcement before the emotion arrives?

Keeping the Fire Burning

How can this community keep the fire of joy burning? How do we pass down memories and create new December moments together? What practices can we establish to ensure joy spreads?

Practical Application: Your Next Steps

For September People

📖 If you need to remember God's faithfulness:

- **Write down** three specific times God showed up for you. Include details: what was happening, how you felt, what God did, and what changed.
- **Share one testimony** this week with someone who needs to hear it. Don't wait for the "right moment"—create it.
- **Create a remembrance practice:** Set aside time weekly (perhaps Sunday evenings) to rehearse God's faithfulness. Make it a ritual.
- **Pass down a story** to a younger person in your family or church. Legacy is built one story at a time.

For Everyone

01

Listen & Reflect

Play "September" and let yourself either remember past faithfulness or anticipate future breakthrough. Let the music move you.

03

Ask the Question

Honestly ask yourself: "Do I need to remember, or do I need to believe the announcement?" Your answer determines your next step.

For December People

📖 If you need to hear the announcement:

- **Speak this out loud:** "Joy has been announced over my life. It's already in motion. I don't have to create it; I just have to believe it."
- **Find one person** who has a September story and ask them to share it with you. Let their memory fuel your expectation.
- **Practice "seeing" before "feeling":** Act as if joy is present even when you don't feel it yet. Move as though the announcement is true.
- **Remember:** You're not creating the joy; you're believing what heaven has already declared over your situation.

02

Read Side by Side

Read Zephaniah 3:14-20 and Luke 2:8-10 together. Notice the parallels between remembrance and announcement.

04

Spread the Fire

Look for opportunities to ignite someone else's hope with your testimony. Joy spreads when we share it.

Closing: Both September and December

The God of Remembrance and Announcement

Joy is both remembrance and expectation. It's both memory and announcement. It's both September and December. It's both looking back at God's faithfulness and looking forward with confident hope. It's both celebrating what was and anticipating what will be.

The God who WAS faithful in Egypt, IS faithful in your present circumstance, and WILL BE faithful in your future. The joy that WAS announced to the shepherds, IS being announced over your life right now, and WILL spread like wildfire through this community.

Whether you're remembering September or experiencing December, joy is available. Whether you're testifying about past victories or receiving the announcement in your current darkness, God is faithful. Whether you're the one spreading the fire or the one receiving the spark, joy belongs to you.

The question is: Do you remember enough to expect it? And do you believe enough to receive it?

Closing Prayer

God of September and December, we thank You for the memories that fuel our hope. We thank You for the announcements that find us in our darkness. Remind us of Your faithfulness when we forget. Announce Your presence when we're afraid. Let our joy catch fire and spread from heart to heart, from testimony to testimony, from generation to generation.

Make us both rememberers and receivers. Make us both September people and December people. Make us both carriers of memory and recipients of the announcement. And let the world see that You are the same God—the God who was, who is, and who will be faithful, forever and ever.

In the name of the One who brings good news of great joy for ALL people, Amen.

Looking Ahead: Week 4 – Love

Next week, we'll explore love through the lens of "That's The Way of The World," discovering how divine love transforms our understanding of community, purpose, and destiny.