The Joy that Shows up
Midnight Mass
2025 CoR

Friends, tonight, Joy does not arrive with trumpets. It does not break the news cycle, nor trend, nor announce itself with flashing banners. Joy shows up quietly. It turns up uninvited.
It arrives in the dark.

This is the hour when joy first came into the world — not at noon, but at midnight; not in a palace, but in borrowed space; not announced to emperors, but whispered to shepherds who were simply doing the night shift. The joy of Christmas is not the joy of things going well. It is the joy that shows up anyway.

If we listen to the world beyond these walls, it has been a heavy year. We have watched wars grind on with no neat endings. We have seen cities shaken by violence, families displaced by fire and flood, economies strained, trust eroded, words weaponised. Some headlines have been so relentless that many have simply stopped reading them — not out of indifference, but out of fatigue. We are tired of bad news. Tired of being braced for the next blow.

And yet — there have been other headlines too. Stories that did not shout, but endured. Medical breakthroughs quietly extending life. Communities rebuilding after disaster, neighbour by neighbour. Ordinary people choosing courage over fear, mercy over vengeance, truth over convenience. These stories rarely dominate the feed, but they are real. They are signs. They are hints of a deeper joy at work beneath the surface of things.

That is the pattern of Christmas.

When Luke tells us that Caesar Augustus issued a decree, he is reminding us who *appeared* to be in charge. Rome had the power, the armies, the census records. Rome could move people around like pieces on a board. And yet, while the empire was busy counting bodies and taxing livelihoods, God was quietly keeping a promise — guiding a young couple to Bethlehem, so that prophecy might be fulfilled not by force, but by faithfulness. Joy did not overthrow Rome that night. It outlasted it.

The child born in the manger does not arrive with a solution to every crisis. He does not publish a five-point plan for global stability. Instead, he shows up — vulnerable, dependent, entrusted to human hands. The joy of God enters the world not as an answer, but as a presence. *Emmanuel.* God with us.

And this is why the angel says to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid.” Not because there is nothing to fear — but because fear no longer gets the final word. Joy has shown up in the very place fear thought it had won: the night.

So much of our own fear lives in the night. The small hours when worries grow louder. The unspoken anxieties we carry about our children, our health, our future, our Church, our world. Christmas does not deny these fears. It meets them. It enters them. It lies down among them, wrapped in swaddling cloths.

The shepherds were not remarkable people. They were not powerful, educated, or influential. They were tired, probably cold, and certainly overlooked. And yet they become the first witnesses of joy — not because they were worthy, but because they were available. Joy shows up for those who are awake enough to notice.

And notice this: the shepherds are not told to *understand* the mystery. They are told to *go and see*. Christmas joy is not something to be solved, but something to be encountered. “Let us go now to Bethlehem,” they say — and that sentence still echoes through the Church, century after century. Let us go. Let us see. Let us not stay where we are.

Tonight, joy shows up again — not in sentiment, not in nostalgia, but in sacrament. In ordinary bread and wine. In a gathered people. In a God who still chooses to come close rather than stay safe. The world may tell us that joy is fragile, fleeting, or naïve. Christmas tells us otherwise. Joy is stubborn. Joy is resilient. Joy is holy. Because joy is not the absence of sorrow. It is the presence of Christ.

And so, in a world still aching for peace; in hearts still carrying grief; in a Church still learning how to be faithful — joy shows up. Not because everything is fixed, but because God has entered the mess and refuses to leave.

Tonight, we are not asked to manufacture joy. We are asked to receive it. To cradle it. To protect it. And then, like the shepherds, to carry it back into the fields of our ordinary lives — glorifying and praising God, not because the night has vanished, but because a light has been lit within it.

Friends, joy has shown up.
May we have eyes to see it.
May we have hearts to welcome it.
And may we, in our turn, show it to the world.

Amen.