

Dear Friends,

A couple of weeks ago, my youngest grand-daughter was dedicated at the church her parents are a part of. It was a great and noisy occasion. She is called Nova. Today's children seem to have an exotic range of names; I remember a little boy I named Harley after his dad's Harley Davidson motor bike! I also met up with some older friends, one of whom is called Joy, which is a great name but little used today. The very word 'joy' has a good feel to it. It sounds light and airy and encouraging.

The bible tells us that Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and it is listed straight after 'Love' in Galatians 5.22. Joy cheers our souls when we are filled with the Spirit and it can spill out into our relationships and communities. Because Joy comes from the Holy Spirit, it begins in our hearts, on the inside of us, in contrast to happiness which starts on the outside of us and depends on what *happens* to us. Joy warms us like porridge on a cold morning, happiness only warms us when the sun is shining.

As we all prepare for Christmas in our families and, as you can see in this Plan, in our churches, we should be into Joy in a big way.

Now that you can see when all your Christmas services are, you can begin to pray for people you could invite, people who need to hear the good news of Jesus amidst the tinsel. People who need joy.

The first Christmas was a joyful time, even the three staid astrologers were filled with joy. Beware seeking mere happiness this Christmas. I like being happy, but it will depend on lots of things going well over this busy and challenging season. Being open to the Lord Jesus Himself dwelling in your heart will bring you a joy which survives circumstance, sustains you to the great life Jesus has for you, and is a blessing and witness to those around you.

I hope and pray that you will have a joyful Christmas.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alastair". The signature is written in dark ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

(Try replacing 'happy' with 'Joy' on your Christmas cards!)