

# JOY:FULLY LUTHERAN

## 1 THESS 5:16-24

**WHEN YOU THINK “LUTHERAN,” DO YOU THINK JOY?** When you tell your neighbors and friends that you are a Lutheran, do they say that Lutherans are joyful people? When you go to worship on Sunday morning, do you go in joy, listen in joy, sing in joy and leave with joy?

“Rejoice always” (1 THESS. 5:16). That is the whole verse — easy to memorize. Rejoice. Always. Because God loves you. Because Jesus died and rose for you. Because the Spirit has called you by the Gospel into this saving faith. Because God is faithful to His promises, and He will surely do it (1 THESS. 5:24).

“Joy:fully Lutheran” is the theme for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod through the 2019 Synodical Convention. Joyfully Lutheran, we live in response to God’s love for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We live joyfully, because God’s love is freely given to sinners through faith for Christ’s sake. We live joyfully, because we do not work to earn God’s love and forgiveness but receive it by faith alone in what Christ has done for us.

Joyfully, we receive God’s Word and Sacraments as His means through which He gives to His children His love and mercy in Christ. We live joyfully, because though we cannot believe by our own reason or strength, the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith in Christ Jesus. We live joyfully, because the Father invites us to pray to Him as children talk to their dear father. We live joyfully, because Jesus has done it all for us.

Our joy is not generic joy. We are not just happy people. We are joyfully Lutheran. We live our lives trusting in the mercy and love of God. Our Savior suffered for us, and we know that our lives also will be filled with trials and suffering, yet we live in joy.

Joy does not mean that we ignore the realities of our lives. Faith in Christ does not remove us from the trials and temptations that befall people in this life. Faith in Christ does not mean that we cannot suffer or sin. Faith in Christ points us to the hope we have in the midst of the difficulties of this life. And Christ is our joy.

The cross is the most prominent symbol of Christianity. We proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. With our Lord, we know that suffering and pain is inherent in our lives as we dwell in this sinful world. With our Lord, we do not expect sinners to embrace the Kingdom, but trust that it is through suffering and death that the Kingdom comes among us. With the Lord, we bear our own crosses and rejoice in the will of the loving Father, even when it seems hidden from our view.

The Christ on the cross is the Christ who conquered death and the grave. We rejoice, because our sins have been removed from us. We rejoice that death no longer has the final word over our lives. We rejoice that our Savior is coming again. We rejoice in the promises of life with Him forever. We rejoice that He is with us in His Word, Sacraments and Church.

I, a poor miserable sinner, am Joyfully Lutheran. Because of Jesus. God’s love in Christ is the reason for joy. Grace, faith, forgiveness, suffering, learning, repenting, washing, eating, drinking, fellowship, mercy, life together — all joys in Christ.

Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. In Christ Jesus. Amen.