

## Moravian Women's Association- Devotional Paper – December 2023/January 2024

### Fruits of the Spirit

*But the Spirit produces love, **joy**, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23a GNB)*

“Deck the halls with boughs of holly – ‘tis the season to be jolly” – so goes the Carol. There’s no doubt that the month of December and the very beginning of January is promoted as the “jolliest” time of the year. I have to confess however, that there has been many a time when, as Christmas drew near, jolly is not how I would have described my mood – stressed, harassed, exhausted – those words might more accurately have described how I was feeling. I also struggle with the merriment around New Year – I find it a melancholy rather than celebratory time.

Some of you may know the story “How the Grinch stole Christmas!” by Dr. Seuss. You can find the entire text of the book online but you won’t get the lovely illustrations. The Grinch hates Christmas and he lives near Who-ville whose inhabitants love Christmas. One year he is determined to stop Christmas coming, so he enters all the homes in Who-ville and steals all the presents. But his plan doesn’t work. Even without all the presents, the inhabitants of Who-ville still gather together and celebrate Christmas. The Grinch realises that Christmas celebrations are based on something deeper than presents, decorations and food –

***“‘Maybe Christmas,’ he thought, ‘doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas..... perhaps...means a little bit more.’”***

We can all be lured into the trap of believing that Christmas will only be Christmas if we fill it with things that can be bought from a shop. Do you remember the “Christmas is cancelled!” newspaper headlines during Covid lockdowns?

But Christmas can’t be cancelled – we may have created a commercial industry around the celebration of Christmas, but at its heart is the birth of a baby. The birth of any baby usually brings joy but this birth, the birth of Jesus brings special joy. It prompted shepherds, angels and perhaps my favourite character of the story “the old prophet Anna” – to rejoice - the verb which describes how we express joy.

### **Read Luke 2: 8-20 and 36-37.**

It’s the joy which Jesus’ birth brings which we need to keep in mind when we are in the midst of all the Christmas preparations. It’s the joy of His birth we need to keep in mind once Christmas is gone and we return to our ordinary daily lives. It’s the joy of his birth we need to keep in mind when times are bad – both in terms of world events and the inevitable times of sadness in our personal lives.

Joy to the World is perhaps my favourite Carol. The first verse contains these words – *“Let every heart prepare Him room”* As Christians, this surely is our number one task at Christmas but also throughout our lives so that in good times or bad, we keep the joy of Christmas within ourselves.

### **Questions**

1. At our MWA retreat in September, Sr Claire Maxwell asked us to think about our weekly activities and decide which of these brought us joy. What things do you do that bring you joy?
2. How can we “prepare Him room” not just at Christmas but all year round?
3. For some, Christmas brings little joy, is there anything you can do as individuals, as a Circle or as a congregation to bring some of the joy of Christmas to people around you?