

FOR SATB CHOIR & PIANO

JOY.

Text by J Reese Norris

Choral music by J Reese Norris - Piano music by Dr. Sandra Bishop

Joy's text draws inspiration from Nehemiah 8:10: "...for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." Two words from the original Hebrew - *āṣaḇ*, meaning "grieve," and *ḥeḏvâ*, meaning "joy" - are woven deliberately into the poetic fabric. In crafting this work, great care was taken to employ quiet symbolism, gently honoring the memory of the precious child in whose memory it was written. The music invites the listener to lift their gaze above the surrounding darkness, toward the distant light that beckons - Joy. Even the strongest faith does not render one immune to the profound and inescapable trials of *mourning* - yet joy, like *morning* itself, arrives: "*morning tugs at shadow's edge.*"

The musical journey mirrors this truth. The A-section is pensive and reverent, a space for contemplation. In the B-section, the spirit rises, and attention turns keenly to joy. The theme returns, only to descend into the relative minor, confronting the hard realities of suffering. From that depth, the music reclaims the vibrant refrain of joy, though it is soon drawn into a contemplative hush, punctuated by a surprising shift. These dramatic turns reflect grief's unavoidable, sudden swings, and the need to hold fast to the enduring anchor of hope and faith.

Joy.

*Do not be grieved; āṣaḇ, āṣaḇ.
This day is holy to the Lord. In quiet
cradles of His love, His gentle hand
will hold you close. Do not be
grieved; āṣaḇ, āṣaḇ,*

*For the joy; ḥeḏvâ, ḥeḏvâ.
For the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

*When sorrow stirs and hope feels thin, yet
not as those whose hope grows dim.
He holds your tears and guards the heart,
with a grace no storm can tear apart.
Do not be grieved; āṣaḇ, āṣaḇ.*

*For the joy; ḥeḏvâ, ḥeḏvâ.
For the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

*Air runs out, the dark holds fast.
Every moment feels like the last.
Walls press close, the night moves slow.
Morning tugs at shadow's edge...*

*For the joy; ḥeḏvâ, ḥeḏvâ.
For the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

~ J Reese Norris, 2026

Choral Score Composer: J Reese Norris is a freelance composer, homesteader, and custom furniture builder at Woodberry Farm in Havana, FL. Previously, Reese spent 26 years as a conductor with middle school, high school, collegiate and adult choral ensembles. To date, Norris has composed over 40 published pieces, including 30+ commissions. Learn more about his compositions at jreesenorris.com

Piano Score Composer: Dr. Saundra Bishop is a collaborative pianist, music educator, church music administrator and community choir director in North Mississippi. Piano performance and pedagogy were her primary areas in higher ed. She taught 26 years at the elementary, middle school and collegiate levels. Working collaboratively with choral ensembles is one of the most rewarding and cherished aspects of her music career.