

Merry Christmas! I love Christmas and all the things The Advent Season means: Hope, peace, joy, and love, the time of waiting and expectancy. It offers for the world, the church, and individuals to re-set. I love how Christmas is about real events, not just pleasant fiction but actual events from actual witnesses. The Bible offers us the witness of shepherds, angels, wisemen, innkeepers, the little drummer boy (just kidding! He’s not in the Bible!) . The Christmas story offers mystery and majesty, keeping us, at the very least, intrigued, but it should keep us engaged because of the evidence and witness of prophecy, of miracles, and of God’s Word.

And with this event, God breaks His 400- year silence with a birth announcement. “Behold,” say the angels to the shepherds, and “Be not afraid!” The time of fear has passed. The age of good news of great joy is upon us. Family, listen. JOY is the language of the Kingdom, and this birth announcement, this breaking news of Advent, shouts joy! Joy is available, attainable, and—thank God!—not reserved for advent alone. Scripture has over 330 references to joy. By contrast, mentions happiness only 26 times, indicating that happiness is earthly, joy transcendent. Joy is closely tied to the gospel, the “good news of great joy.” C. S. Lewis has written, “Joy is the serious business of Heaven.” Joy is defined as a “source or cause for delight.” In our Gospel reading, we see how becoming a witness of the majesty of God brings joy because of the source: Upon seeing the pregnant Mary, Elizabeth is “filled with the Holy Spirit” and tells Mary, “44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” Encountering the Son of God and experiencing God’s majesty brings JOY! Joy is available to us because Christ is available to us.

To appreciate Christmas as we should, we need to regain reverence and awe for the majesty of God. If we are His, we are witnesses proclaiming that Christ is here, declaring this wonder in our joy The Apostle Peter saw God’s majesty in Christ: “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty,” he writes (\*2 Peter 1:16-18). And we experience it. Warren Wiersbe says this: “Joy is a deep, abiding inner peace and rejoicing,” but it’s a quality missing in too many Christians. So, I ask, “Christian, how’s your joy?” Joy is often forfeited by the heart that chooses to complain, forgetting to count the blessings God gives us. Inventory your heart now! Do you display joy in the way you talk? It doesn’t matter if you are capable of speaking in tongues if you complain in English. Joy is evidence, an internal awareness of an eternal reality. I choose joy because Joy chooses me (\*\*Colossians 3:1-3).

Our joy speaks to the intimacy of our relationship with Him. Experiencing true joy is a result of having experienced true grace, having been forgiven of our sin and united with Christ. Each of us is a witness of His majesty because of the experience and transformation of His salvation. Our joy is grounded in hope, a hope that is not dependent upon circumstances, a joy that consults the Word and the truth of God before it consults emotions generated by this world. David writes in Psalm 16:11, “You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy.” Joy is an attribute that should be on full display in the life of a believer.

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\*2 Peter 1:16-18

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”[a] 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

\*\*Colossians 3:1-3

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Let me return to our Gospel reading. A young woman, Mary, very human, very confused, experiences all sorts of human emotions in response to her extraordinary circumstances:

And look, your relative Elizabeth has also become pregnant with a son in her old age—although she was called barren, she is now in her sixth month! 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” So, Mary said, “Yes, I am a servant of the Lord; let this happen to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her. Luke 1:36-38

Note her response: “Nothing will be impossible with God. . . let this happen to me according to your word.” My family, you do not need an angel to declare these things to you. That’s the beauty of the Word of God and of the relationship we get to have with Him. We can experience and display the same joy that the fetus John exhibits when he encounters Jesus as his mother Elizabeth greets Mary. The joy we experience will be awe-inspiring. The good news of great JOY is still here. It is for everyone. We are each still invited to encounter Christ, personally and intimately.

In this consecrated season of intentional waiting and preparation, the question is then, “How’s my heart?” Am I embracing the awe and wonder of the gift of Christ? Do we need to pray as King David did in Psalm 51:12, “RESTORE TO ME THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION”? Is the joy of the Lord your strength today? Why is joy to important to the Christian? It involves our witness. How’s your heart this morning? Do you spend more time complaining that rejoicing? Inventory your own heart. Ask God to restore in you the Joy of your salvation. Be merry at Christmas with the JOY of the majesty of Christ.

Passages in support of this sermon:

Psalm 96:1-9

1 Sing to the Lord a new song;

 sing to the Lord, all the earth.

2 Sing to the Lord, praise his name;

 proclaim his salvation day after day.

3 Declare his glory among the nations,

 his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

4 For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;

 he is to be feared above all gods.

5 For all the gods of the nations are idols,

 but the Lord made the heavens.

6 Splendor and majesty are before him;

 strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

7 Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations,

 ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;

 bring an offering and come into his courts.

9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of his[a] holiness;

 tremble before him, all the earth.

Luke 1:39-45

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”