

JESUS: GOD'S GIFT OF JOY

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Text: Luke 1:26-49

“Despite the Scrooges among us who annually decry the commercialization, the crassness, and the blatant sentimentality of so much of the Christmas preparations, it is still a magical time of the year. The daily popping out of multi-colored lights at doorways and windows, the Christmas tree lots that seem to spring up overnight, the magnificent window displays, the wreaths, the tinsel, the reds and greens, and sound of bells—it all evokes a tone of excitement and anticipation. It is as if the entire world is preparing for a visit from an emissary from another world.

Of course, like typical Americans, we overdo it. Much of the music is too loud and incessant; we are saturated with carols long before Christmas ever arrives; many of the decorations are too big, too gaudy; but still, isn't it a remarkable time of the year?

Our impulse to create a fairy tale stage seems to take our minds off the harsh Christmas realities. For even as we are caught up in the glitter and the tinsel we know that all is not well in the world. **Fact**, murder and robbery in the United States reaches its highest peak in December. **Fact**, the Christmas season ranks just under Memorial weekend in the number of car wrecks on the highway. **Fact**, the suicide rate will begin its annual climb until it peaks out at what some call the "big downer" New Years Eve. This is the reality of Christmas. No tinsel, no glitter—just harsh reality.

So we turn from a fairy tale setting that appears to gloss over and deny, to a Christmas Biblical narrative that appears on the surface to do the same thing. The story has the ring of a fairy tale. There is Elizabeth, for example, and her husband Zechariah, an

elderly couple who have long since despaired of having any children, suddenly making an announcement to the community that she is with child. His name was to be called John. Later he would be known as the Baptist. Even Zechariah is unbelieving as he says in amazement, "I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." Yet, it happened.

Across town there is another birth announcement and this one too has the ring of mysticism. The young girl Mary, who is barely more than a child herself, the betrothed to Joseph, suddenly finds herself with child. Like Elizabeth, she is a peasant, a nobody, a nameless face in the passing parade of history. Yet, she is told that this child is to be called Emmanuel, which means God with us.

And then the two get together, the old lady pregnant with John, who will be called the Baptist, and the young child pregnant with Jesus, who is to be called Emmanuel. And the child in Elizabeth's womb kicks at the sound of Mary's voice. Whatever are we to make of this strange story of visions and angels and virgin births? Truth? Fiction? Legend? Fact?" (Bret Blair?)

The secret to the great *blessings* of this story is found in verse 45. Everything hinges on this statement.

"Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

The truth is that we open the same door of possibility and wonder and miracles when we welcome the message of God into our hearts. This passage is not merely a historical record of what took place, but also an example of what we must be willing to do if we are to truly receive God's gift of joy.

I. THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST IS RECEIVED BY FAITH.

A. Jesus entered first into the life of Mary and then into the lives of humanity.

Note Mary's receptive attitude. "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. Luke 1:38 NIV

B. The Kingdom of God is built as Jesus first enters one life and then is shared with others.

C. With Jesus' entrance into each life He comes bearing the gift of joy.

Someone wrote, "Men have pursued joy in every avenue imaginable. Some have successfully found it while others have not. Perhaps it would be easier to describe where joy cannot be found:

Not in Unbelief -- Voltaire was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Not in Pleasure -- Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone."

Not in Money -- Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying, he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

Not in Position and Fame -- Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret."

Not in Military Glory -- Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent, before he said, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

Where then is real joy found? -- the answer is simple, in Christ alone. *The Bible Friend*, Turning Point, May, 1993.

True JOY is found in the PERSON of Jesus Christ.

II. THE BLESSINGS OF JESUS CHRIST ARE RECEIVED BY FAITH.

A. Jesus comes to accomplish eternal purposes.

Luke 1:31-33 reads, "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

Jesus did not come to build an earthly kingdom, but rather a spiritual one. He did not come to save us politically or socially, but rather spiritually.

It has been said that, "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior." Source Unknown.

B. Jesus offers His blessings and Joy to ALL who will believe on Him.

Mary said in our text, “His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” Luke 1:50-55 NIV

Peter spoke of Jesus and the extent of His joy in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, “And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’” Acts 3:25 NIV

C. The JOY of the Lord is a gift that is received to all who accept Jesus Christ as the gift of God.

CONCLUSION

On June 6, 1981, Doug Whitt and his bride, Sylvia, were escorted to their hotel's fancy bridal suite in the wee hours of the morning. In the suite they saw a sofa, chairs, and table, but where was the bed? Then they discovered the sofa was a hide-a-bed, with a lumpy mattress and sagging springs. They spent a fitful night and woke up in the morning with sore backs.

The new husband went to the hotel desk and gave the management a tongue-lashing. "Did you open the door in the room?" asked the clerk. Doug went back to the room. He opened the door they had thought was a closet. There, complete with fruit baskets and chocolates, was a beautiful bedroom! Opening all the doors in a honeymoon suite is like obeying all the words of Jesus. Discipleship is the door to happiness.

■ Cynthia Thomas, Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 1.

In order to experience all the joy of Christmas all year long we must open all the doors and receiving Christ into our daily lives with joy.

“Blessed is she (the one) who has believed that what the Lord has said...”