

## Joy to the World!

Sterling UMC  
December 24, 2009  
Luke 2:1-20

Perhaps it was on a night much like tonight. A small group of shepherds tending their flocks are huddled by a campfire trying to keep warm in the cold, damp, night air. Suddenly their weary minds and exhausted bodies are startled by a light in the sky. It was the brightest light they had ever seen. It got closer and closer, and brighter and brighter. Too terrified to move and paralyzed with fear, suddenly they hear a voice coming from the light. It was the voice of an angel.

“Do not be afraid,” the angel said. “I bring good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

And with that glorious angelic proclamation to the lowly shepherds we hear the greatest good news ever heard by human ears. Joy to the world the Lord is come! And that is what we gather to remember and celebrate tonight. And that is exactly what we need! GOOD News.

The reason I stress this is because it seems to me that many have missed the fact that this is GOOD news. Look around as you stand in line at a store. Are most of the people smiling? No. Most look stressed out; weighted down. Christmas often appears to be a burden.

Why is this? The simple answer is that they are looking at the wrong thing. People think Christmas is about proving our love for someone by spending money we don't have to buy a person something they don't really need. We think Christmas is about parties, decorations, and increased activity. Christmas is an obligation we need to meet.

Do you see how far we have drifted from the truth? The gift at the center of the good news is not a new video game system, iPod, computer, or expensive jewelry. The focus of the good news is Jesus. It is the message that God has not given up on us. Even though we have made mistakes; even though we have ignored God's counsel and have gone our own way, God has not given up on us!

The good news of Christmas is that there is hope for the hopeless; there is healing for the broken! There is life for those who feel dead inside. There is forgiveness for those who have turned away from the Lord.

We turn on the television and we hear all kinds of bad news. There is bad news about the economy, the environment, the government, and crime that reveals a growing decay in our society. However, when you open up the Bible it is different. Instead of bad news

there is good news: hope, life and joy have come to us in Jesus Christ. The solution to our problems, the answer to the deepest issues of our life is Jesus!

And as the angels sang this is good news of GREAT joy. The joy that the coming of Christ brings is a joy that dwarfs any of the joys the world has to offer. There are some great joys in life: the birth of a child, marital union, promotions, awards, victories. However, in comparison to the joy that can be ours in Christ, they pale by comparison.

Why is this such joyful news? It is joyful because it tells us that God has drawn us close. The enmity between God and humanity has ended because God has come to us in a manger in Bethlehem. God has brought about the solution to our greatest problem: the alienation of sin. What greater joy could there be than knowing that we can be made right with God?

Why is this such joyful news? Because it represents promises fulfilled. Way back in the Garden of Eden there was a promise that the Devil would be defeated. Satan was told that there was coming a day when a woman would have a child and, "he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15). Abraham was told that through his descendents "all the nations of the earth would be blessed." (Genesis 12:3). David was told that his Kingdom would have no end. In Jesus all those promises were fulfilled. Satan was defeated, the whole world was given a Savior, and He became King forever as a descendent of David. God keeps His word. And as God has kept His word in the past, so He will keep His promises to us today.

Why is this such joyful news? Because it changes our perspective on the hard times. There is joy even...

- For the one who has lost a loved one. Because of Jesus we know that those in Christ are not gone . . . they have simply gone ahead. Death is not the end of the story. Though we grieve we do not grieve as those without hope.
- For the one who has made horrible mistakes. Whether that person is in jail, ostracized from their family, or is paying a steep price for a lapse in judgment. Christmas reminds us that "If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) The coming of Christ opens a door to a new beginning even to those who feel they are out of chances.
- For the one who feels desperately alone. It may be you have no one with whom to celebrate at Christmas. You may have lost your family due to any number of reasons. You may be separated because of work, military service, or even conflict. Christmas is the declaration that God cares, sees, understands, and has not given up on us. He will *never* leave us or forsake us.
- For the one who is overworked. In the stress of life Jesus promises a peace that passes all understanding.
- For the one who has reached the top of the world and has found that there is nothing there. Jesus reminds us that true joy comes not from titles and perks, but from a deep and abiding relationship with the Ruler of the Universe.
- For the one who faces an illness that threatens their life. Jesus reminds us that "He who believes in me will live even if He die."

- For those who feel inadequate. Scripture reminds us that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. He reminds also that He will supply all our needs. We can move forward confident that He will equip us for every good work.

Christmas changes our perspective on the hard times of life. It is meant to lead us to a time of celebration, laughter, and singing. That's why we sing "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come!"

May I ask, have you taken the message of Christmas personally? Have you let it penetrate to the depths of your soul? Is it old news or good news to you? The message of Christmas is meant for YOU even as it is meant for me. And it is meant for all people.

You see the Shepherds understood that this was not news they could/should keep to themselves. They understood the truth that when you discover something life-changing you should share it with others.

And that is our job as well. In a few moments we will celebrate the Lord's Supper, then we will each light a candle and sing Joy to the World. But we can not and we must not merely blow out our candles and hush our voices and go from this place unchanged, content to keep this message to ourselves. We owe it to everyone we meet to tell them this great truth.

You see Christmas is only the beginning of the story. When you put away your gifts and take down your decorations the holiday will be over. However, for the child of God, the adventure is only beginning. Let the message of Christmas affect the way you live your life not only in December, but also in January, June, July and every other day of your life.

Here is our security. Here is our peace, our hope, our joy. God has come into our world in the babe of Bethlehem. Why shouldn't we sing for joy on this night of nights? Something very special happened in our world two thousand years ago. A babe was born to a humble couple, a babe who makes it possible for us to know and to love God. It doesn't get any better than that. Let the celebration begin! Joy to the World the Lord is come!