

Advent 2022: Joy – Luke 2:8-14

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[0 : 00] Good morning. I'd like you to turn with me to Luke chapter 2. Luke chapter 2. Luke chapter 2. And I'll be reading verses 8 through 14. Luke 2.

! Luke 2, 8 through 14. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round them, and they were filled with great fear.

And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you.

[1 : 12] You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

Father, thank you for your word and the life that it gives us. May we be nourished on it today for your glory and for our joy.

In Jesus' name. Amen. This second week of the Advent season, we have, I'm in the South too long. We have the opportunity to remind ourselves of the importance of joy in the gospel and in our daily lives.

One thing that the scripture clearly teaches us is that God wants you to experience great joy.

[2 : 25] God created you and me with the unique capacity to experience joy. He has equipped us with physical senses that enable us to enjoy the world around us.

We not only see with our eyes, but we delight in seeing the beauty of sunsets and flowers and puppies and newborn babies.

We enjoy the wonderful sounds of waterfalls, jingle bells, bird songs, symphony orchestras, and familiar voices.

We savor the flavors of milk and honey and smoked jalapeno peppers. We relish the flavors of peppermint and pine and vanilla and breezes from the sea.

And we take pleasure in the sensations of fur and cotton and water and sand between our toes at the beach in the summer.

[3 : 40] And in the gentle, warm touch of friendship. We also experience joy in significant events like births and weddings, victories and accomplishments and unexpected surprises.

God designed each of us with the capacity to enjoy the world he made. And I believe he expects us to express our delight.

It is an act of worship when we direct our delight in joy toward him. In spite of the curse that has tainted our fallen world, we still have the capacity to experience much joy in it.

But I believe God also wants us to experience another sense of joy. He has actually given us the capacity to enjoy him.

King David declared it in Psalm 16 when he said, In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

[5 : 05] And in Psalm 43 he specifically calls God my everlasting joy. In spite of the judgment that looms over a rebellious world, the Lord has made it possible for us to experience joy in him even now.

That is Advent joy. God holds out to you the possibility of experiencing joy in him through the good news of Advent.

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Psalm 34 8. Now, we should expect an increase of joy in a holiday season that celebrates the coming of the Savior into the world.

But we should also be aware that much of the joy we observe at this time is from different sources. Some are looking forward to a vacation from school.

Some are still dreaming of a white Christmas. Most anticipate visits with good friends and family.

[6 : 37] These as well as the giving of gifts and receiving of gifts bring about happy emotions in all of us. But much of the joy observed at this season isn't really Advent joy.

Joy that is dependent on a season is not Advent joy. And any joy that has its source in temporal circumstances is not Advent joy.

The uniqueness of Advent joy can be observed in the story of the incarnation. And in the association of joy with the announcement of Jesus' birth.

That announcement points to joy's significant role in the gospel. The passage we read from Luke teaches us that God sent the long-awaited Messiah into the world as a baby so that you would experience a fuller and more lasting joy.

I believe this truth is emphasized in the passage through an interesting contrast in the story. The contrast is between the initial response of the shepherds who saw an angel and the response that the angel indicated most accurately corresponds with the message he was bringing.

[8 : 16] I'd like to focus on our time together on that contrast. Because I believe this contrast highlights two things that God wants us to understand in order to experience Advent joy.

First of all, the better you understand your need for the coming of Jesus, the more you can understand and experience great Advent joy.

The first part of the contrast is found in verses 8 and 9. Look at those verses again with me. And in the same reason, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.

Now, this is not the first time in the Bible that we've seen angels appearing and bringing great fear to those who observed them.

[9 : 33] The Bible records many angelic visitations, and several include responses such as the shepherds. If you remember, the prophet Daniel wrote of being completely drained of strength, falling into a deep sleep, and then trembling on his feet, simply at the vision of a heavenly being.

And in the previous chapter of Luke's account here in chapter 1, both Zechariah and Mary had to be told to not be afraid.

But what is unique about the appearance of the angel to the shepherds is the addition of the phrase, the glory of the Lord shone around them.

Verse 9. It's easy, I think, to pass over the significance of that phrase. During the Exodus, when the glory of the Lord appeared at Mount Sinai, we're told that it was in a cloud, and was like a devouring fire at the top of the mountain.

Exodus 24, verses 15 through 18. And another time, when Moses asked God to see his glory, God had to put Moses in the cleft of a rock and covered him with his hand in order that he might shield him from a direct view of God's glory.

[11 : 11] And that was to protect him from death. Exodus 33. Now, of the shepherds, it says, that glory shone around them.

The shepherds' fear was understandable. Not only because they saw a supernatural being, that was frightening enough, but also because of such an encounter with God that must have been terrifying, likely heightened their own sense of sinfulness before a righteous God.

Most of us here have, at some time, become very aware of our need of Christ. But many people still don't understand that need. Well-meaning Christians often misrepresent the need.

Jesus is presented at someone who simply helps us in our loneliness or gives us a reason to live, provides significance for our lives, or even helps boost our self-esteem.

But the gospel message says that we need to be delivered from God's good, righteous judgment and wrath.

[12 : 45] The greatest need everyone born into this world needs, or has, is to be delivered from the judgment of a good God.

If you don't sense that need, it's because you're not a, you don't see your own self, really, in view of this good God.

And this understanding is essential to experiencing adventure. The other part of the contrast is observed in verse 10.

And the angel said to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

The great fear of verse 9 stands in stark contrast with the great joy of verse 10. Now, I admit that the author of the gospel doesn't comment specifically on the contrast, but the connection is just so obvious.

[14:04] In light of the contrast, I would like to suggest that the Holy Spirit intended that contrast to communicate something important to us about our experience of the gospel.

I believe that in order to fully experience great Advent joy, you must not only need to grasp your need, your need of Jesus's coming, but second, you need to understand the joy of the good news and the good news that brings that joy.

Now, what do we mean by joy? I like older definitions because they're a little more full. Webster, 1828 definition of this English word joy says, the passion or emotion excited by the acquisition or expectation of good, the excitement of pleasurable feelings which are caused by success, good fortune, gratification of desire or some good possessed or by a rational prospect of possessing what we love or desire.

Gladness, exaltation. Isn't that a little more full than the Oxford a feeling of great pleasure or happiness? This definition cites various causes of joy, but at its core is a pleasurable feeling, a passion or emotion excited by the acquisition or expectation of good, the excitement of pleasurable feelings.

Joy is typically understood in that way. There has been a great deal of discussion about the difference between joy and happiness in the Christian world.

[16:19] some make a strong distinction like one popular 19th century evangelical who wrote this. Joy is distinctly a Christian world and a Christian thing.

It is the reverse of happiness. Happiness is the result of what happens of an agreeable sort. Joy has its springs deep down inside and that spring never runs dry no matter what happens.

Only Jesus gives joy. He had joy singing its music within even under the shadow of the cross. As wonderful as that sounds to us, it really doesn't agree with either the English or the Hebrew definitions of the word joy.

joy in the Bible refers to emotions and celebrations but both the godly and ungodly are referred to as having or experiencing joy.

[17:27] The main distinctions in the Old Testament are the objects of the joy which for the godly is God himself and its duration salvation.

Job 20 verse 5 declares the joy that's the same Hebrew word simcha the main word for joy all throughout the Bible it says the joy of the godless is for a moment.

And on the other hand Isaiah says that the godly are promised an everlasting joy. I draw your attention to this because over the years some have tried to present joy as something altogether different from the happy emotions that we share with all people.

What they suggest is something like an emotionless joy. Oxymoron if I ever heard one. That just isn't so.

The various biblical synonyms that depict joy simcha and sason and gil and ranan they are all distinguished by the way emotion is expressed.

[18:59] There is a joyful shouting there is a joyful singing there is intense joy there is quiet joy but in all cases the joy is clearly observable.

Nehemiah even records a time when the people's joy in Jerusalem was so great that it was heard at a far distance. Nehemiah 12 43 says this and they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced for God had made them rejoice with great joy the women and the children also rejoiced and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

Now the angels announcement of great joy of the good news of great joy to the shepherds was described as one that brings the same great joy.

joy it's joyous news because it's the fulfillment of the long awaited answer to the human predicament. It is the news of the anticipated messianic king.

It is news of a savior who is Christ the Lord. It is news of God's gracious plan to save his people from his wrath through the death the sacrificial death of Jesus.

[20 : 37] It is the news of forgiveness. It is the news of granting a righteousness to those who are unrighteous.

I can't help but believe that the contrast seen here in these few verses is intended to emphasize the wonder of the message.

It's benefit to Israel. It's grander. It's mystery. And it's amazing initiation in these humble circumstances among shepherds and sheep.

But I also believe there is something more being communicated here by the phrase great joy. The prophets of Israel wrote a great deal about joy and predicted a time when joy would be prominent. I mean, they didn't just indicate that there would be joy at the arrival of the new heavens and the new earth. But they prophesied that joy would characterize the new heaven and the new earth.

[22 : 04] In Isaiah 65, 17 through 19, we read this, for behold, I create new heavens and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind but be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy and her people to be a gladness.

And then he says something interesting. I, the Lord speaking, will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people.

No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. Now, this passage informs us that God himself rejoices.

It's a part of who he is. And that he has destined us, the people of God, to reflect his joy in one great climactic amazing eternal way.

We characterize our joy and reflect his joy. And that joy will never end. Now, though the prophet spoke of a day that is still to come, there's no doubt that God wants you to experience this joy now.

[23 : 50] Advent joy is a message of present joy as well in the anticipation of a future joy. The first Christians experienced this joy.

And joy was a prominent characteristic of the early church. One theologian in the late 19th century said this, the New Testament is the most buoyant, exhilarating, and joyful book in the entire world. Do you see it that way? In the pages of the New Testament, we see joy everywhere. We see it in the proclamation of the gospel in Philippians 1.

We see it in the joy of the salvation of the lost in Luke 15. We see joy in suffering Romans chapter 5.

We see joy in persecution Acts 5:41. We see joy in prison Acts 16:25. Joy at the loss of property for the sake of Christ Hebrews 10:34.

[25 : 00] And joy because of faithful disciples written by John in 2nd John and 3rd John. The New Testament also directly instructs us to rejoice in the Lord always in Philippians chapter 4.

And it reminds us that our joy in the midst of trials is inexpressible and full of glory. 1st Peter 1. 8. Now in case you're wondering inexpressible doesn't mean there that it can't be seen. It just means that you can't express it enough.

No matter how expressive your emotion of joy is, it is not enough to meet with the glories of what we have been given and promised.

Advent joy is a joy that transcends all other joys because it is based on the goodness and greatness of God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit in their presence and eternal work on our behalf.

[26 : 17] It is a relational joy that we experience a joy we share with one another. It is an experiential joy. It is observable and undeniable.

It is an effectual joy. It powerfully affects the way we live and strengthens us to resist the misguided joys of the world.

And it is a lasting joy. A joy that never ends but ever increases.

The contrast of fear and joy in the story of the shepherds encounter with the angels and the glory of the Lord instructs us about God's desire for us.

It teaches us that God's or God sent the long awaited messianic king into the world as a baby so that you would experience great joy.

[27 : 22] Fear and joy in our own lives are often gauges of spiritual health. Fear has many causes but it generally indicates that we haven't fully embraced and experienced Advent joy.

I would like to close with a quote from a pastor who spent a lot of time studying the topic of joy and is somewhat of an authority on Jonathan Edwards perspective of ever increasing joy. And he writes this perhaps the greatest mistake you could possibly make is to think that an emphasis on joy breeds passivity or leads to a safe and self absorbed lifestyle or an approach to Christianity in which the believer is so obsessed with the condition of his heart or his emotional state of being that he neglects his family or ignores the need of his neighbor or becomes coldly indifferent toward the lost or retreats in isolation from the hurts and needs of others and then he goes on to define this joy it is a deep delight and joy in the all satisfying beauty of Christ that stokes the white hot flame of passion for the plight of the nations it is the it is deep delight and joy in the all satisfying beauty of Christ that energizes the will of man or woman to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to preserve a marriage that is falling apart it is deep delight and joy in the all satisfying beauty of Christ that empowers the human heart to overcome addicted behavior and sustain the soul in its fight against sin and temptation it is deep delight and joy in the all satisfying beauty of Christ that enables weak and broke the weak and broken soul to persevere when a job is lost or a child rebels or a promise is shattered or a dream comes to not it is deep delight in the joy of an all satisfying beauty of Christ that encourages the timid and fearful heart to engage and confront the Christless culture in which we live with the good news of the gospel of the cross of Christ and the life of forgiveness and hope that can only be found through faith in Jesus it is deep delight and joy in the all satisfying beauty of Christ that will sustain a church through adversity and bind the hearts of its people together in unity and love and mutual affection this is the joy that is ours for the taking now and forever because God has sent to us his son a savior who is Christ the Lord joy to the world indeed so may God bless you today and this next year with a greater awareness of your need of [31 : 09] Christ as well as with a greater experience of the satisfying fullness of Advent joy this season and the coming year let's pray together