

The Gift of Joy
Luke 2:8-20

Friends, you might agree with me that Christmas is somewhat of a paradox. And that is because while Christmas is one of the most joyful times of the year, for many, it is the most depressing time of the year.

That might be hard to believe as we look around and hear Christmas carols played in the stores, we see the streets and businesses downtown are decorated with lights and garland. You hear people singing and laughing together as they gather for Christmas parties.

It's that time of year when the spirit of love and giving are exhibited, enemies put aside differences, families reunite, and all seems right in the world – at least for a few weeks.

That's the joy of Christmas

Now if you were to bring that closer to home and ask people what that specifically meant to them they might say...

It's being able to spend time with my family.

It's the wonder and love in the eyes of a child when they open their gifts.

It's sitting at night in the dark with just the Christmas tree lights on

It's singing Christmas carols and praises to God.

But as we said there will be those who will say there is no joy in Christmas for me. Many do not have joy at Christmas time.

Perhaps...

It's their first Christmas away from home; they can't be with their family

They've lost a loved one.

They can't afford to buy their children gifts this year, Life is tough and they don't have anything they want to celebrate, they've lost their faith!

That's why Christmas time can be a paradox, a contradiction, the irony of ironies because at its core Christmas is the time

when we are reminded of the birth of Christ, that great news which the angels sang about, and it has grown into all this...

The giving of gifts, family dinners, vacation time, decorations, lights, all these wonderful ways that we celebrate the season that give us joy. In fact it becomes easy to make the mistake of thinking they are the source of the joy of Christmas.

I used to run my own painting and home renovation business and I had one particular customer that was a bit tricky to work for because at her house – it was Christmas year round. She filled her house with Christmas decorations, snowmen, reindeer, little Santa statues, Christmas trees, mistletoe, garland – you name it, she had it hanging up somewhere. It made it a very difficult context to try and paint and redecorate in!

But she did this because “Christmas” gave her joy – and she needed these items up all year round in order to give her the joy she needed to get through life. But what would happen if these Christmas decorations stopped giving her joy? She’d be in a bad state for sure,

And friends that’s what happens to many of us at Christmas time. That’s why for some it is a contradiction. All the decorations, the celebrations, the parties, the family visits, the presents...all of it, it no longer gives joy.

And that is sad!

But, equally sad is the fact that for others it is the trimmings and trappings of the season which give them joy instead of the main event which started it all!

So friends, today we need to hear the angel’s announcement all over again – because it brings us back to the source of Christmas joy, to the event which all the trimmings and trappings are supposed to help us remember.

The angel said to the shepherds, and it echoes across the centuries to *us* as well -

“I bring you good news that will cause great joy!”

Great joy friends! That’s God’s gift to us at Christmas time. God wants us to have joy! To understand it, to experience it, to

be filled with it, to have it overflow out of our lives to others around us!

Joy is contagious like that, and long ago it spread from the joyful announcement which the angel made to the shepherds, and I pray that as we read about it, as we hear about it today that it will spread to you as well!

Good news... that will cause – great joy! I can't wait to tell you about it –*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

So friends if you or someone you know lacks joy this Christmas because

They are out of work,

They can't buy presents for their kids

They are sick and fighting a disease

They've lost a loved one to death

There is no peace and love in their family

The can only see the evil and horrible things which happen in our world

Whatever the reason...

Listen to what this baby has been born to do.

(Isaiah 42)

"In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope."

God has sent him "to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷ to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."

(Isaiah 61)

God has sent him "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

This is good news isn't it. And if you lack joy in your life because there is no justice, because you can't see any light in the darkness which has taken over your life, if you are held captive to addictions, or are in the dungeon of depression, or sick and in need of healing oil - then this child that was born was born to do something for you!

Listen to what can happen in our world, and in our lives because of him

⁴ [People] will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. ⁵ Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. ⁶ And you will be called priests of the LORD; you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. ⁷ Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance.

Life will be good for you once again, that's the promise made here. There will be health, restoration, prosperity, work, employment, blessings...

All because this little baby has finally been born! ...I have **good news** that will be the cause for **great joy!**

Now this happened 2000 years ago – and since that time our world has seen much increase in health, restoration, prosperity, work, employment and blessings... things to be joyful about. However it is obvious that sickness, destruction, famine, and evil have also increased as well – you know that from your own experiences.

So the good news that brings great joy won't produce true joy at Christmas if it's just an exercise at sticking our heads in the snow to ignore those bad things that still exist. If we simply use the lights, and décor as a false front to simply **pretend** the world is a better place for a few weeks. So Christmas is still a bit of a paradox isn't it?

That's because we forget this baby was also born to do something else, we often don't read far enough in the prophecies about him to get to it.

This baby was born to bring judgment. If we read a little farther in Isaiah 42 we find this

¹³ The LORD will march out like a champion, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.

¹⁴ “For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant. ¹⁵ I will lay waste the mountains and hills and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools.

But friends, this hasn’t happened yet! Jesus has not yet brought the final judgment that will result in the destruction of evil - of the devil and his demons, of sickness, disease, sorrow suffering and the like.

Jesus has not yet returned as He promised He would...but when we hear “the good news that is cause for great joy” each Christmas...it’s a reminder that one day He will!

And until he returns, the evil that exists and plagues this world only makes the lights of the Christmas promise shine brighter as we wait for Jesus. The suffering, sickness and sorrow that enters our lives only serves to push us towards Bethlehem “to go and see this things that has happened” which promises salvation!

Friends, this Christmas remember - Jesus first came into our world as a little baby, and angels announced the good news of his birth to a small group of shepherds, and they sang “*glory to God in the highest*”

And Jesus will come again as the King of Kings; the Ruler of the Universe to whom all power and glory has been given. And the angels will announce this good news as well.

¹⁵ *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”* (Rev 11:16)

Friends do you hear the great news? Then you will have great joy!

You will have true joy – the Joy that God wants to give you as a gift this Christmas.

So may all the Christmas lights, the decorations, the time spent with family, the celebrations, and the gifts – be symbols and reminders of the source of true joy for you. That there is great news which is cause for great Joy. Amen.