

December 15, 2024
 The Mission of Christmas Produces Joy
 Isaiah 12:1-6; Luke 2:10-11
 Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...

Joy is a wonderful emotion to experience. It's the feeling you get when you're thrilled about going on vacation, when you're laughing with friends, or when you're simply with a loved one. But this feeling, however, can leave us in an instant depending on our circumstances in life. But biblical joy is a different kind of joy. The joy that we have in Jesus, and that never leaves...

The word joy appears over 300 times in the scriptures. For instance, the Psalms are filled with references to joy. For example, the psalmists write, "Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Ps. 30:5b) and "Shout for joy to God, all the earth" (Ps. 66:1). Likewise, in the New Testament, we read that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), which means that it is a marker of the Christian life. Given these few examples and the bible's emphasis on the subject, we need to understand what joy is and pursue it.

John Piper defines Christian joy as, "a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world." So, according to this definition, true joy is not something that is caused by us, or by our circumstances, but true joy is something that is stirred up in our soul by the Holy Spirit when we have a relationship with God through faith in his Son, Jesus. And it's this kind of joy that we are going to be looking into today as we continue through the advent season from the perspective of those who foretold and witnessed his first advent so that we are filled with the same expectation as we wait for his second. If you are able, please stand as I read the word of God. [Read Isaiah 12:1-6; Luke 2:10-17]

Isaiah 12 concludes a section of the book of Isaiah that began back in ch. 7. It follows Isaiah's description of the glorious kingdom to come in Israel's future. This will be when the "root of Jesse," the Messiah, returns to earth and establishes His kingdom (Isaiah 11:10). And among other things, he will gather the scattered people of Israel, reunite them as one nation, and give them final victory over their enemies (Isaiah 11:11-16).

And as we come to ch. 12, Isaiah promises that "in that day," (vs. 1) Israel will thank the Lord for all he has done for them. They will acknowledge that he was rightfully angry with them and thank him for turning away his anger and mercifully giving them comfort.

Now, it's important for us to remember that Israel was given this prophecy while suffering through the judgment of the Lord for their unfaithfulness to him. A peaceful, grateful future would have been hard to imagine as their homes were destroyed and their people were marched off into exile.

Isaiah has been calling all along for Israel to repent and insists that the Lord will judge his people for their sin. But "in that day," look at vs. 2, salvation will come in and through the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel. And they will declare that God is their salvation. They will fully trust him and there will be no more room for fear. They will proclaim that he alone is their strength and song and salvation.

Then in vs. 3-4, it was prophesied that, in response, they will joyfully participate in the Lords' salvation, fully and eternally provided for by the Lord. They will call each other and the world to join them in the joy and praise of their God. They will encourage each other to share the

stories of his works among the peoples of the world. And they will invite all the nations to join them in exalting the name of the Messiah.

Isaiah continues in vs. 5-6, saying that they all will sing praises to the Lord and call attention to his glory. They will spread the word of his greatness to all the earth. The inhabitants of Zion will shout and sing for joy because the promised savior is “in your midst.” This prophecy, and many others like it in the Old Testament, created a longing and expectation that was going to do something to rescue his people. But then centuries past, and the Messiah had not come yet. The people began to wonder, “How much longer Lord?” And many gave up hope.

This is the backdrop as we come back to the familiar passage from Luke 2 that we have read already during advent and we read again today and we look this time at the angel’s joyous announcement and shepherds’ reaction to it. So, Isaiah speaks of a day when God’s salvation would come in human form, his Messiah in our midst, and the response to this amazing gift will be joyous praise as the message of what he has done is shared with the world. And in Luke 2, we find the much-awaited immediate fulfillment of that prophecy. Immediate in the sense that it’s a prophecy that has a clear application in the present, but also points to a larger, more significant fulfillment that will happen in the future. So Jesus came once as described in the gospels and will come again as described in Revelation and both advents fulfill this prophecy.

And so, in its immediate fulfillment, Jesus, God’s Messiah, had been born and, according to our passage in Luke 2, that was indeed “good news of great joy.” And that “good news” would be “for all people of the earth.” And the response to this “good news” produces a joy that cannot be contained and must be shared with others. Let’s see how this plays out as we look more closely at the text.

Now, keeping with our ongoing theme, the mission of Christmas, God’s redemptive mission of sending his Son to be born to rescue us from the penalty of sin, that mission of Christmas produces joy because it is, in fact, good news. What is this good news of great joy? “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” This good news that brings great joy is the birth of the Savior. The long-awaited Messiah was born, and he was now in their midst just like Isaiah had said. Remember, the prophet said the Holy One of Israel that was promised would be in their midst. (Isa. 12:6) This now had taken place and they could go see Him.

But why is this good news of great joy? Well, in one sense, as I just mentioned, there were 400 years of silence from God in between the Old and New Testaments. No revelation. No word. Nothing. Any word from God would have been good news. And the last time God does speak through his prophets in the Old Testament it’s with a word of judgment. But now, with the announcement of the birth of Jesus, there is good news because God’s salvation had come.

Another reason this good news produces great joy is because of who Jesus is. He is the Christ, the Messiah. He is the promised Savior, God’s anointed one. He is the promised seed of the woman in Gen. 3:15 who will crush the head of the enemy. He is the suffering servant of Isa. 53 that would die for the “sins of many.” The angel told Joseph in Matthew that this child’s name will be Jesus, “For he will save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Jesus said of himself that, “He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). The birth of Jesus is good news of great joy because he is God’s salvation.

This was not just any child who was born, but the King of kings and Lord of lords. He fulfills the promise God made with David that he would have one of his offspring sit on his throne forever. He is the Lord of the universe who spoke everything into existence, and by his word, everything continues to exist. These were not empty words from the angel. They were the

good news for those who had been waiting so long for God to keep his promise and we see that in the response of the shepherds. They rejoiced.

The second way in which the mission of Christmas produces joy is because it is for all people. By this time in Israel's history, shepherds had become outcasts in society. Shepherding was a lonely and dirty line of work. And so why did God choose to deliver his good news of great joy to these lowly shepherds? Well, by coming to them first, God revealed that his grace was sufficient for all humanity, including the lowest shepherds and the poorest outcasts. 1 Cor. 1:27-28 says, "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are."

The good news of great joy expresses the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. In God's kingdom, the poor, the meek, the humble, and persecuted are welcome to enter and experience inexpressible and glorious joy (Matt. 5:3-12; 1 Pet. 1:8). This kingdom is not reserved for the wealthy and upper-class members of society, but for those who enter by his grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus would extend God's invitation to join his kingdom not just to Jews but to Gentiles and all people in the whole world: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come," he said in Matt. 24:14. This includes you and I. If we have embraced Christ by faith we are included in God's family and this good news produces a joy within us that has to be shared.

And that brings us to our third, and final point. The mission of Christmas produces a joy that must be shared. In Luke 2:17, we read "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." Just like what we're told in Isaiah 12 when we're told that the nations will be invited into the joy and celebration of what God had done we see the shepherds begin the process of doing just that.

When you experience something good, you just can't help talking about it. That may be a great meal, a good book or a movie, a great song or a beautiful picture. Whatever the experience, it leaves such an impression on us that we want to share it with others. We have to share it! Good news needs to be shared.

Such was the impact on the shepherds and they just had to tell other people about it. The news was so joyous and tremendous that they couldn't keep it to themselves. The news about Jesus brought light into the darkness of a shattered world. Like the shepherds, we need to realize that this good news is not just ours, it needs to be shared.

And this began a movement that we see played out in the Gospels and the Book of Acts. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance and prepared the way for Jesus. Jesus spent approximately 3 years preaching and teaching the Kingdom of God. And then Jesus then sent out his disciples to preach the good news and make disciples. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered the early Church to spread the story of the Savior to new lands and new people. And that a mission of sharing the good news continues with the church today. Again, you and I are part of this ongoing mission to declare to the world what God had done from an abundance of joy.

The gospel is the good news that we preach with our words and in our actions. The good news of Jesus brings hope to those who are lost, light to those in darkness, and joy to those in despair. We share the gospel because we have experienced its truth and power for ourselves and the joy it produces, and we have confidence in the gospel's transformative power on others.

It is easy during the holidays to lose the feeling of joy. You might be heading into the Christmas season with a heavy load on your shoulders. This might be your first Christmas

without a dearly loved spouse, a child, or a close friend. Family relationships might be contentious. You are unhappy and sad. The seemingly contradictory truth of the gospel is that it does not take away our sorrow and sadness, but it gives us a deep, abiding joy in the midst of it. Let me give you this reminder this morning, as I have to remind myself. Joy is not found in our circumstances but in our Savior, Christ the Lord.

If you are in Christ, you can have great joy because he has taken care of the biggest problem you will ever face, your sin and separation from God. God is our creator and is holy, and we have sinned against him. But out of his great love, he sent forth his Son to redeem his enemies. God the Father, in Christ, has taken those who were his enemies and made them his children. Jesus obeyed where we disobeyed, and he died the death we deserved and was raised from the dead for our justification (Rom. 4:25). There is no better news, there is nothing that could be a source of greater joy. When we behold the glory of Christ in the gospel, we will continually be reminded of this good news of great joy.

And so, as we leave here this morning, let us follow the example set by the shepherds. Let us use every opportunity and every means possible to spread the word about who Jesus is and what he has done and that they too and experience this inexpressible joy that is only found in him. It's not just good news, it's the best news. Let's share it! Would you pray with me?

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (Rom. 15:13)