



Christmas is all about **JOY** & **HAPPINESS**. However, there are some big differences between the two. Joy reflects your *character*. Happiness reflects your *circumstances*. Joy has to do with your *heart*. Happiness has to do with your *happenings*. Of course, we all want joy and happiness. Everybody does. In fact, God created us for both. And in Heaven, we will have both to the “Nth Degree.” But here in this world, happiness comes and goes with the times. Joy, on the other hand, is something that can stay with you and stabilize you throughout a lifetime. Interestingly, people with a solid foundation of joy, also seem to have a greater capacity for finding happiness and holding onto it longer. So then the question is this: How do you find joy for your heart and hold onto it no matter what’s happening? Well, in the Bible, there is the story of a very young teenage girl who experienced the most frightening moment in her life and came through it discovering the most profound joy anyone could ever know. Her life is a great example from God to us, teaching us how to have lasting joy in life. Oh, by the way, you may have heard of this girl. *Mary* is her name, and her “fear to joy” story is found in **Luke 1:26-47**.

The redeemed of the Lord will come to Zion where they will find everlasting happiness and joy! (Isaiah 35:10)

WHEN LIFE GOES FROM HAPPY TO HAYWIRE

(Luke 1:26-28)

WHAT HAPPENS IF FEAR TAKES OVER

(Luke 1:29-34)

1. Fear freaks you out ...
2. Fear causes you to miss the ...
3. Fear focuses you upon ...

WHERE YOU'LL FIND THE JOY

(Luke 1:35-37)

1. The ...

2. The ...

3. Other ...

4. An ...

HOW TO MAKE GOD'S JOY YOUR OWN

(Luke 1:38-46)

1. Like Mary ...

2. Like Mary ...

3. Like Mary ...

4. Like Mary ...

5. Like Mary ...

6. Like Mary ...

FOR THOUGHT & TALK

In your small group take no more than 5 minutes to review the main points of this week's message. Don't expect to answer all the questions. Just choose to discuss the ones your group would.

Crowd Breaker ... What was the one Christmas gift you received as a child that made you the most happy, even if it was for only a short while?

Last Week Review ... What are the three meanings of the term **advent** as it relates to Jesus?

1. What would it have been like to be a 12 to 15 year-old peasant girl, living in the small town of Nazareth, to have the angel Gabriel dropped in on you, unannounced, and tell you that you would be the mother of the Son of God who would save the world? How would you respond to that emotionally, mentally, physically?

2. What are some of the key differences between **joy** and **happiness**? Did you realize that God wants us to have both? Why will we not have uninterrupted happiness until we get to Heaven? How has fear of this life's **pain, pressure, people, and problems** caused you to lose your joy at times?

3. In **Luke 1:35-37**, the angel Gabriel told Mary about the resources that were available to her for finding the joy that the Lord wanted her to have. What were those resources and how, when we put them to work, can they help us be more joyful? And by the way, who are some of the most joyful Christians you have known in your life? How did being around them make an impact on you?

4. One of the steps of faith that Mary took to increase her joy involved humbly accepting and embracing God's unexpected plan for her life. The older we get, the more we realize that God's plan for each one of us has a lot of the “unexpected” to it. This Christmas time, in order to experience the joy the Lord wants you to have, what are some of the unexpected things of life you are needing to accept and embrace as part of God's plan for you personally?

5. Looking at the other four steps of faith that Mary took to experience joy, which one do you need to zero in on this Christmas? And when you think of this Christmas, what is it about Jesus that makes you the most **happy** and **joyful**?