

The Joy of Christmas

DT- Share the joy.

Thank you _____ family. The third advent candle, the pink or rose-colored candle does signify joy. We can find joy in many things. Paul told the church in Philippi that they could make his joy complete if they all could have the same humble attitude that Christ displayed. Joy is a fruit of the spirit, a character trait that we all should have and should express. Jesus even said in John 6:24, "You haven't done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy."

Who wouldn't want abundant joy. Pure, God given joy can be found in many things. Today I want us to see the joy surrounding the birth of Jesus. When you look at the events surround Jesus' birth, and the people who normally make up our nativity scenes; they each have a reason to be joyful, but why. Why is there so much joy in the birth of Jesus? I'm going to do my best to answer that question today, let's pray before we get started.

PRAY

There are many things that can bring us joy during the Christmas season. The time spent with family and friends can bring joy. Gift giving can be a joyful thing, both the hunt for those gifts but also the surprise on their face when they open it. Surprise gifts are fun and joyful, but so are surprise visits. Maybe you've surprised a family member by showing up on Christmas day when they thought you weren't coming. My aunt lived in California for several years but one year she flew back to Oklahoma City and surprised us all. That was a pretty joyful Christmas for everyone.

We like to go look at all the light displays both here in town, which have gotten more impressive over the years, but also in the bigger cities around us as well. Seeing the lights and spending time with family brings joy, especially if you finish your light trip with some ice cream. Christmas parties are another time of joy and laughter. If you're like my family you might have old home videos of previous Christmas's. Watching those can certainly bring some joy and wonderful memories back to your mind.

All those things are great and truly do bring us joy during the Christmas season, but we would have none of that pure and true joy if not for the joy surrounding Jesus birth. Let's look at the people involved in the birth of Jesus and see from their perspective how they found joy in the savior who was born in Bethlehem. We'll start with the wisemen, and the wisemen find joy in the search for and the worship of Jesus.

1. The wisemen find joy in the search for and the worship of Jesus.

Matthew 2:1-12 describes both their search and their worship of Jesus; Matthew writes, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him." King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote: 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'" Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!" After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod."

These Wise men were probably astrologers from Persia or Arabia. That's why they noticed the star leading them to Christ. But this part of the Nativity story is not all about wisemen following a star in search for the King of the Jews. These Magi, these wisemen, were Gentiles. There is something a little ironic about a situation where Gentiles bring news to Jerusalem, to the Jews, that the King of the Jews has been born. The birth of Jesus has a universal significance; it goes way beyond the Jewish people.

As the story moves along Herod has the chief priests and teachers of the law tell him where the Christ was to be born. They quote that passage from Micah where it says the Christ will be born in Bethlehem. Herod tells the wisemen this and tries to trick them into coming back and reporting to him where Jesus is. Of course we know that through a dream they are warned not to go back to Herod.

Finally the wisemen make it to the house where Jesus is. Apparently some time had passed since his birth and the family is now in a house. Although it has taken them a while to find Jesus, I'm sure there was joy in the journey. What do you do when you have joyfully searched for Christ, following this star for days? What is your reaction when you've found him and the search is finally complete? You joyfully worship. That's what the wisemen did. They bowed down and worshiped him. Then gave him the gifts they had brought, and probably found great joy in the reaction of Mary and Joseph.

Do you find joy in the searching? Maybe you've been reading scripture trying to find an answer to a question and then one day you find it clear as day. Isn't that a joyful thing. Or maybe you're just in the word consistently, or doing some reading plan on the Bible app and a passage comes up that just fits what you've been going through and whether that season of life has be rough or smooth, there's joy knowing that scripture is alive and powerful, living and active.

Maybe the joy you find in the searching has to do with a better clearer understanding of scripture. Maybe you've just recently turned your life towards Christ and put your faith in him, and you can look back with joy over the search you were on for the savior. There can be joy in the searching.

There should also be a tremendous amount of joy in our worship. In our singing of course, but in all our worship there can be joy. The wisemen worshiped by giving gifts. When we give to God in worship our tithes and offerings there should be joy involved in that. We can worship through work, we can worship through rest, we can worship through prayer. Whatever way we might be worshipping, an element of joy should always be present just like it must have been for the wisemen.

There's joy in the searching and the worshipping of our savior. The wisemen of course were not the only ones to visit Jesus, the shepherds get that same opportunity as well. The shepherds found joy in what they heard and what they saw.

2. The shepherds found joy in what they heard and what they saw.

Luke 2:8-20 describes this part of the nativity scene. Luke writes, "That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them."

Somewhere in the fields of Bethlehem, probably where David had keep sheep years before are a group of shepherds. Now it doesn't tell us why the shepherds are together, many times the shepherds would be alone with their flock but for whatever reason, maybe safety, or just good company, these shepherds were together and had driven their flocks into the open field.

To a simple group of shepherds an angel of the Lord appears. Now that alone would be enough to scare you but what I think we miss sometimes as we read through this passage is that not only does the angel of the Lord appear, but the glory of the Lord is there too. This is the same glory that Moses saw in the burning bush, the same glory the Israelites saw in the pillar of fire. And the shepherds are terrified. I bet they were, and the angel says don't be afraid, it's okay I bring to you good news of great joy for all people.

The angel tells them that today a Savior is born and he is the Christ. The angel tells them how they will recognize him. He will be wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger. Most babies would not be found like that. For the wisemen they got a star to guide their way, for the shepherds the angel gave them a detailed description of Jesus and what he would be wearing and where he would be found. This means that the shepherds will see Jesus first and the wisemen traveling from a far come later after Mary and Joseph and Jesus have moved inside a house.

After the angels leave the shepherds it says they hurried off to find Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in manger just like the angel had said. But it's the reaction the shepherds have in verse 17 that I love. It says, "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them."

Because of what the shepherds heard from the angel and saw in Jesus they had this abundant joy that overflowed so much that they had to spread the word about Jesus. After you saw Jesus for the first time after you realized your need for a savior because of the sin you have in your life and you accepted Christ and where baptized, did you joyfully spread the word like the shepherds? I know I did. The first thing I started thinking of was all my friends who didn't know, who didn't have this joy that I had. I'm not ashamed to tell you that I went to work trying to bring as many of my friends to Christ as I could.

Do you joyfully spread the word today? Do you take every opportunity you get to tell someone about Christ, to tell them about the joy that is found in Jesus? Because of what you've seen and heard do you spread the news like these shepherds did? Don't wait, take a hold of Christ today and find the real joy of Christmas in what you have already seen and heard. Then spread that news to anyone willing to listen. Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile."

It doesn't matter if you're a Gentile wiseman, or a Jewish shepherd in the field, the joy of Christ's birth is for everyone, because we know what that little boy is going to grow up and do.

We've seen the joy the wiseman had in the searching and the worshiping, and the joy the shepherds had in the hearing and the seeing. What about Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph found joy in being the ones chosen to birth and raise the Messiah.

3. Mary and Joseph found joy in being the ones chosen to birth and raise the Messiah.

Let's look at Joseph first, will go to Matthew 1:18-23, "This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement* quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.' " When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife."

I've always thought Joseph had it tough. I mean to be the dad for the Messiah would be a tough job. We don't hear a lot about Joseph but there is something in this passage that I think we father's can pay attention to. First we see that Joseph was a righteous man. Why? Well first we need to understand what's going on here. Joseph and Mary are engaged. The engagement period lasts about one year. Our engagements today can be broken off any time before the wedding, but in Mary and Joseph's time an engagement could only be terminated by death or divorce. An act of unfaithfulness or adultery was grounds for divorce. Joseph felt like he could not in good conscience go on with the marriage. So his two options were either expose Mary to public shame by initiating legal proceedings, or he could privately give her a bill of divorce.

It may seem weird to us, to see any righteousness in that but the fact that he was going to choose the route of quiet divorce shows his sense of compassion for Mary. Joseph blends righteousness, doing the right thing, and compassion together, something we see in Jesus character as well. Something we as fathers should pay attention to. Raising our children with righteousness, holding them accountable, but with a measure of compassion. I think in the end Joseph found great joy in raising Jesus. Do the same with your children.

Now I want to look at Mary and her life at the time of Jesus' birth. Here's how Luke describes her situation in Luke 1:26-38 it says, "In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin." The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her."

Here's Mary a normal girl from Nazareth who God is about to use to change the world. The angel Gabriel tells Mary she has found favor with God. Because of that you are going to have a child. The angel tells her to name him Jesus just as another angel will tell Joseph. Gabriel says that his kingdom will reign forever.

I want you to notice her reaction to this unbelievable news. She says how will this be since I am a virgin? This completely remarkable unbelievable news is met with belief. She doesn't doubt anything the angel is telling her, her faith is strong she simply wants a little more explanation about this situation. I believe you, and I believe God can do this but how?

So Gabriel explains that the Holy Spirit will come upon you, not in a sexual way like some religions and cults believe, but in a miraculous way. After Gabriel has finished his explanation look at Mary's response, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."

How many of you would be willing to say that? I am your servant God, use me however you want, may your will be done. I think sometimes we don't want to say that, because what would happen if God asked us to do something we were uncomfortable with. Like have a baby. I'm sure Mary was a little scared but she had faith. One thing I do know, because I've seen it on my wife's face three times. The moment a mother gives birth to her child, there's joy. (There's joy for a lot of reasons; first because the baby is now out of her, but more so because now the baby is here, and she can hold it in her arms.)

In the description of the shepherds, you may have noticed a short little interruption to describe what Mary was doing in the midst of all this. Luke 2:19 says, "but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often."

I wonder what that means? Other translations say Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Whatever that means exactly, I have to believe that it at least means that she found joy in being the one to birth and raise the Messiah. I'm sure there was some measure of joy in what she treasured and pondered in her heart.

There's still one person left in the nativity scene. Jesus himself. In the end the real joy of Christmas is found in what Christ would eventually accomplish.

4. The real joy of Christmas is found in what Christ would eventually accomplish.

What did he accomplish? The conquering of death and the securing of eternal life for anyone who would place their faith in him. That accomplishment should bring us great joy. If you're searching for the joy of Christmas you will find it most of all in Christ. There's something to learn about joy from the wisemen, the shepherds, and even Joseph and Mary but the real joy of Christmas is not the nativity scene at all. It's what it points to. I believe the real joy of Christmas is found in the cross and even more so the empty tomb.

Peter put it this way in 1 Peter 1:8-9, "You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls."

The joy of Christmas is about the stone that was rolled away so we could have eternal life. The beginning of the story is awesome, and we need to hear it and we need to learn from those who were a part of it, but it's not all about the nativity. It's the ending of the story that can save you and that's where our joy culminates, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

My challenge to you today can be summed up in 3 words. Share the joy. Today we searched through scripture and found the joy of Christmas. We found it in the wisemen's search and worship of Jesus. We found it in what the shepherds heard and saw. We found the joy of Christmas in Joseph and Mary and their opportunity to birth and raise the Messiah. Ultimately the joy of Christmas comes in knowing what that baby will someday accomplish. We found the joy; do you share it?

Have you been sharing the real joy of Christmas with those around you, with the people you run into while out Christmas shopping? Do you share the joy of Christmas with the cashiers, the waiters, your co-workers? When was the last time you guided someone to Christ, I mean from hi my name is Ross to I now baptize you in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit. We've got to share this joy church.

Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

He saved us, not through the manger, that had to happen for him to be here, but it was at the cross where he took our sins and died. Then three days later he rose and now we have abundant joy. He gave us the best Christmas gift you could ever receive, and he told us to go re-gift it. I love the joy surrounding Christmas, but let's not get so wrapped up in the hustle and bustle that we forget what we're called to do church. Share the joy.