

Week 3 Christmas Series: The Joy of Christmas

December 13, 2025

Opening Monologue

Welcome to the AVC App, everybody! You've landed on the Sermon & Commentary section. As you scroll down, you'll find spiritual insights, commentary, and devotional questions tied to this week's message. Dive in—it's all here to help you get better equipped in God's Word.

We're in week 3 of our Christmas series called "The Joy of Christmas," and this Sunday's sermon is titled "The Three Sounds of Christmas Joy."

Let's be honest, the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season can flat-out drain your batteries. Rewind the clock about 25 years (back when I was a much younger buck—LOL). Online shopping wasn't a thing yet. My wife and I were running from store to store, checking gifts off our list. And when the kids were little? Good old Toys"R"Us was the spot! (By the way, the few TRU stores still around today are wimps compared to those original big-box wonderlands.)

Here's the reality: as wonderful as giving and receiving gifts can be, true joy can't be wrapped in pretty paper and stuck under a tree. Biblical joy runs much deeper. It's an inner strength and gladness that flows from the presence of God and His amazing grace. Bottom line? When God sends salvation, the sounds of joy ring out and reign in the air.

This Sunday we're diving deep into that truth with passage after passage that will flood your heart with the joy of Jesus. I'll also give you several practical ways to unleash more of that joy in your everyday life. So come in person or jump online—either way, get ready to be encouraged and equipped by God's Word.

When God announces the birth of the Messiah—Jesus Christ our Lord—three distinct sounds of Christmas joy fill the atmosphere:

- Heaven's angels exploding with praise
- Shepherds running to see their Savior
- And the Magi falling on their faces in worship

Matthew 2: 10-11: "When they (wisemen) saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

They gave Jesus their very best—and friends, so should we. Jesus is the real joy of Christmas.

Join us this Sunday as we peek through the stable door into the nativity and rediscover the real Christmas story.

See you Sunday!

In Christ,

Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "Week 3 Advent Series: The Joy of Christmas" Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Texts

Proverbs 17:22

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%2017%3A22%20&version=NIV>

1 Peter 5:7

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%205%3A7&version=NIV>

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes%204%3A9-10%20&version=NIV>

John 15:11

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?>

[search=John%2015%3A11%20&version=NIV](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2015%3A11%20&version=NIV)

Ephesians 5:25

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%205%3A25%20&version=NIV>

1 Peter 4:8

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%204%3A8%20&version=NIV>

John 10:10

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2010%3A10%20&version=NIV>

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes%203%3A12-13&version=NIV>

Lots of Hustle and Bustle of Christmas Can Drown Out Our Joy

The lights are up, the music is playing, and the calendar is packed. We're told this is "the most wonderful time of the year," yet for many of us the season feels more like a sprint to exhaustion. Shopping lists, crowded malls, credit-card statements, parties we "have to" attend—if we're not careful, the very season that is supposed to bring great joy can drain the life right out of us.

Can anybody relate?

You finally collapse on the couch Christmas night, surrounded by ripped wrapping paper and half-eaten cookies, and you think, "Is this really what it's all about?"

Here's the truth we all know deep down:

Yes, there is great joy in giving and receiving gifts, but true joy can never be wrapped in a box—no matter how big, how shiny, or how expensive.

Biblical joy is different.

It is a deep, steady gladness and an inner strength that comes from knowing we belong to the Lord and that the Holy Spirit walks with us—even on the hard days when nothing feels perfect. Our joy flows from receiving God's everlasting grace.

So how do we keep the hustle and bustle from drowning it out?
Here are five practical, Scripture-soaked ways to protect and increase your joy this Christmas (and all year long):

1. Stop taking life so seriously—laugh more and trust the Lord more.

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” (Proverbs 17:22, NIV)

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)

2. Spend less time at work and more time with the people you love.

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

3. Invest deeply in your relationship with Jesus—the true source of joy.

Jesus said, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11)

4. Intentionally love the people closest to you—family, friends, spouse.

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Ephesians 5:25)

5. Let your hair down—life is meant to be enjoyed, not just endured.

Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.” (John 10:10)

Here’s a simple way to remember it:

Let the J in JOY stand for Jesus first.

When you draw closer to Him, joy naturally follows.

This Christmas, don’t let the hustle drown out the hallelujah.

May the presence of the One who left heaven to come to earth fill your heart with uncontainable joy this Christmas.

Jesus is the real reason we can be merry—and He is the real joy of Christmas.

(1, Rev. Standfest)

When Salvation Comes, Joy Comes

Whenever God breaks in with salvation, joy erupts—loud, uncontainable, and impossible to silence.

We see it all across Scripture.

When the Israelites marched out of Egypt, delivered from slavery, the people burst into song on the far side of the Red Sea—tambourines, dancing, and shouts of victory filling the air.

When young David dropped Goliath with a single stone and the army of Israel was set free, the women came out singing and dancing:

“As they danced, they sang: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.’” (1 Samuel 18:6–7)

When the exiles finished rebuilding the temple after seventy heartbreaking years in Babylon, joy rang out again:

“For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the Lord had filled them with joy...” (Ezra 6:22)

And when Nehemiah and the people finally completed the wall around Jerusalem, the Word of God was read aloud and the people lifted their voices:

“...for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10)

Then the pages turn to the New Testament, and the greatest salvation of all arrives.

Heaven can’t stay quiet. The angels explode in song:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (Luke 2:14)

The shepherds sprint to the manger, see the promised Messiah lying in straw, and leave the stable glorifying and praising God with hearts overflowing.

The Magi travel from the east, guided by a star, and when they find the child they fall on their faces in worship. They open their treasures

and lay the very best at His feet.
This—this is the sound of salvation.

This is the joy Christmas is truly about.
May we never lose sight of it.

May we never lose hope, because Jesus Christ, the Savior who stepped out of heaven and into a manger, is with us today, tomorrow, and forever.

And the joy He brings doesn't end when the decorations come down. It lives inside every believer—real, deep, unshakable joy—365 days a year.
When salvation comes, joy comes.

And because of Christmas, salvation has come.
Let the joy ring.

(1, LAB, Rev. Standfest)

Commentary on Main Scriptures

The Joy of the Incarnation: A Commentary on Luke 2:1-11, 8-14, and 18-20

The birth of Jesus in Luke 2 stands as one of the most profound declarations of divine joy in Scripture—a joy that erupts from the heart of God and cascades into the ordinary lives of humanity. Far from a sentimental holiday vignette, this narrative unveils salvation's arrival as "good tidings of great joy" (Luke 2:10), a theme that pulses through every verse. As Dr. David Guzik observes in his *Enduring Word* Commentary, the story unfolds against the backdrop of Roman imperial pomp under Caesar Augustus, whose "pax Romana" promised superficial peace through conquest and taxation. Yet, in this very moment of earthly registration and control, heaven interrupts with the true Prince of Peace, whose birth brings not enforced order but liberating joy to the marginalized. The Life Application Study Bible echoes this, noting that God's sovereignty weaves through human history's chaos: the census, meant to tighten Rome's grip, instead fulfills Micah 5:2 by drawing Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, where the

Messiah enters not as a conqueror but as a vulnerable infant. This humility is the seedbed of joy—God’s grace inverting worldly power, inviting all to rejoice in a Savior who identifies with the lowly.

Luke 2:1-11: The Sovereign Setup for Salvation’s Joy

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (Luke 2:1). Guzik highlights the irony here: Augustus, deified by Rome as a bringer of peace, unwittingly serves God’s redemptive plan. The census—likely the first under Quirinius as governor of Syria (v. 2)—required Joseph to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, his ancestral home in Judea (vv. 3-4). This was no mere logistical detail; it was divine orchestration. As the Life Application Study Bible notes, such registrations were burdensome, often sparking unrest (as seen later in Acts 5:37), yet they underscore God’s control: “Even political decisions and oppressive governments cannot thwart God’s plans.” Mary, great with child, accompanies Joseph (v. 5), and while they are there, “the time came for her to give birth” (v. 6). No royal chamber awaits; instead, “she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (v. 7).

This scene brims with understated joy amid apparent deprivation. Guzik remarks that the manger—a feeding trough for animals—symbolizes Jesus’ identification with the poor and outcast, fulfilling Isaiah 53:2’s prophecy of a Messiah without earthly splendor. Yet, this very lowliness sparks profound gladness: the King of kings arrives not to demand tribute but to offer Himself. The Life Application Study Bible applies this practically: “God’s Son came to earth not in luxury but in poverty, to identify with the poor and needy. He understands our struggles and invites us to find joy in His companionship during hardship.” Echoing this, Matthew Henry, in his Commentary on the Whole Bible, sees joy in the fulfillment of promise: “The birth of Christ was the joy of all who waited for him... a joy that shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.” Henry emphasizes that this joy is anticipatory, rooted in the “consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25), a theme Luke weaves throughout his Gospel.

Other scholars align seamlessly. In *The Gospel According to Luke* (from the New International Commentary series), Joel B. Green notes that

the census motif evokes themes of empire and exile, contrasting Rome's joyless bureaucracy with the liberating joy of God's kingdom. Green writes, "The narrative subverts imperial ideology: Augustus registers subjects for taxation; God registers His Son for salvation, bringing joy to the oppressed." Similarly, Warren Wiersbe, in *Be Courageous*, celebrates this as "heaven's birthday party crashing earth's dull routine," where joy emerges from obedience—Joseph and Mary's faithful journey mirroring Abraham's (Genesis 12). The joy here is not fleeting happiness but a deep-seated strength, as Nehemiah 8:10 declares: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." In a world of mandates and migrations, God's quiet entry announces that true registration is in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27), inviting eternal celebration.

Luke 2:8-14: The Heavenly Announcement—Joy for All People

Shifting from the stable to the surrounding fields, Luke introduces shepherds "keeping watch over their flock by night" (v. 8). These were societal nobodies—ceremonially unclean, socially despised, yet entrusted with lambs for Jerusalem's temple sacrifices. Guzik points out their proximity to Bethlehem made them ideal witnesses: "God often reveals Himself to the humble and overlooked, as He did with Gideon or Amos." Suddenly, "the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear" (v. 9). This theophany—echoing Exodus 3 and Isaiah 6—stuns with divine radiance, but the angel's words pivot from terror to triumph: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people" (v. 10).

Here, joy explodes as the central theme. Guzik unpacks v. 10 as the Gospel's essence: "This is the first preaching of the gospel in the New Testament—good tidings of great joy for all people." The announcement specifies: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (v. 11). "Savior" (*sōtēr*) evokes deliverance from sin's bondage; "Christ" (Messiah) the anointed King; "Lord" (*kyrios*) divine sovereignty. The sign? A baby in a manger (v. 12)—humble, yet unmistakable. Then, "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 willing'" (vv. 13-14, ESV rendering for clarity).

The Life Application Study Bible illuminates the inclusivity: “The shepherds were not looking for angels or the Messiah, but God sent His message to them anyway. God often reveals Himself to people who are not expecting Him... The good news is for everyone.” This democratizes joy—no elite access required. Guzik adds, “The angels’ song contrasts heaven’s harmony with earth’s discord; true peace comes not from politics but from God’s goodwill toward sinners.” Matthew Henry amplifies the doxology: “Glory to God in the highest—because the work of our redemption is the greatest glory of God’s wisdom, power, and grace... Peace on earth—reconciliation between God and man.” Henry sees this as joy’s cosmic scope: angels, who had no stake in redemption yet rejoice (cf. 1 Peter 1:12), modeling heaven’s delight in one sinner’s repentance (Luke 15:10).

Aligning scholars enrich this. Darrell L. Bock, in *Luke* (Baker Exegetical Commentary), ties the joy to reversal: “The lowly shepherds receive what kings longed for (cf. Matthew 2)—a divine birth announcement that upends social hierarchies, infusing joy into the forgotten.” Chuck Swindoll, in *The Joy of Christmas*, calls it “heaven’s flash mob,” where joy “bubbles up from the unlikely,” urging modern readers to “let the angels’ song drown out holiday stress.” John Piper, in sermons on Luke 2, emphasizes eschatological joy: “This peace is shalom—wholeness from God—promising joy that outlasts circumstances.” The multitude’s praise (v. 13) evokes Revelation 5:11-12, where redeemed creation joins the chorus, underscoring that salvation’s joy reverberates eternally.

Luke 2:18-20: The Earthly Echo—Pondering, Proclaiming, and Praising

The shepherds’ response cements joy’s transformative power. “And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them” (v. 18). Luke uses *thaumazō* (wondered), a recurring motif for encountering Jesus (e.g., Luke 1:21; 7:9), blending awe and pondering. Mary, in particular, “treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart” (v. 19). Guzik interprets this as Mary’s meditative faith: “She didn’t fully understand, but she held these events close, letting God unfold the mystery.” The Life Application Study Bible applies: “Like Mary, we cannot understand how God brings good out of pain... We must trust that He is directing our lives. When we can’t understand our situation,

we can trust that God is still in control.” This pondering fosters joy’s depth— not superficial glee, but reflective gladness amid mystery.

The shepherds, however, burst into action: “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them” (v. 20). Their return to the fields isn’t retreat but radiant witness—joy propels proclamation. Guzik notes, “They didn’t stay in the stable; they went back to life, but transformed, praising God for fulfilled promises. Their zeal rebukes our ingratitude.” The Life Application Study Bible challenges: “The proper response to the Good News is to tell others... The shepherds’ excitement was contagious; let yours be too.” This models evangelism as joyful overflow, not duty.

Scholars like Henry reinforce: “Their glorifying and praising God is an implied reproof of our indolence... The cradle’s wonder should move us more than Calvary’s cross, yet often it does not.” In *Luke for Everyone*, N.T. Wright sees joy in continuity: “The shepherds bridge heaven and earth, carrying angelic praise back to daily toil, showing joy’s portability.” R.C. Sproul, in *A Walk with Jesus*, adds, “True joy isn’t hoarded; it’s heralded. The shepherds’ praise echoes the Psalms—joy as weapon against despair (Psalm 16:11).” Precept Austin compiles: “Joy here is *chara*—grace-given delight—that strengthens amid trials, as James 1:2 urges.”

Weaving It All Together: The Unshakable Joy of the Manger

In these verses, joy is no abstract emotion but salvation’s soundtrack—announced by angels, embodied in a baby’s cry, pondered in a mother’s heart, and proclaimed by rough-handed men. Guzik summarizes: “The world needed a Savior, not another emperor; Jesus brings joy that emperors can’t tax away.” The Life Application Study Bible distills the call: “Celebrate Christ’s birth by sharing the joy of knowing Him with others.” As Henry, Bock, and Wright concur, this joy subverts empire, elevates the lowly, and unites heaven and earth in praise.

Other voices harmonize: In *The Birth of the Messiah*, Raymond Brown notes the narrative’s “liturgical joy,” designed for communal retelling. Eugene Peterson, in *Tell It Slant*, urges: “Let the shepherds’ feet carry you to proclamation; joy unspoken is joy diminished.”

Ultimately, Luke 2 invites us: Fear not—rejoice! The Savior’s birth heralds joy for all people, a gladness that, as Piper says, “satisfies the soul forever.” In a weary world, may we, like the shepherds, return praising, our lives a living doxology to the God whose joy redeems.

Mary’s Joy: The Magnificat That Still Fills Our Hearts and Homes This Christmas

Beloved, one of the most radiant moments in all of Scripture is when a humble teenage girl from Nazareth breaks into song—and the song she sings is pure, overflowing joy.

Dr. David Jeremiah beautifully captures the scene:

“Imagine for a moment that you have just received the greatest news of your life... Mary, a simple peasant girl, was already looking forward to her greatest day—her own wedding ceremony. Then, without warning, without preparation, she was looking directly into the eyes of an angel... And then Gabriel shared the most amazing information of all: This presence of God would bring about the birth of a child who would be His own Son... An immediate surge of self-congratulatory pride would have overcome most of us... But Mary expressed only her simple obedience... A few days later Mary hurried to the side of her cousin Elizabeth... When she saw Mary coming, Elizabeth cried out in an expression of joy... Mary, having waited days to share the amazing news that had come into her life, expressed a little joy of her own.”

And oh, what joy it was!

At that moment, Mary lifted her voice and sang what the church has treasured for two thousand years as the

Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55, NIV 1984):

And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,

for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to

generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has

scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has

brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”

This is not a polite little thank-you note. This is explosive, heaven-echoing joy!

Notice what Dr. Jeremiah points out: Mary did not invent this song on the spot. Almost every line is woven from the fabric of the Old Testament. She is quoting and alluding to:

- Hannah’s song of triumph (1 Samuel 2:1-10)
- Psalms 103, 107, 111, 126, 132, 138, and others
- The promises to Abraham (Genesis 12 & 17)
- the covenant faithfulness of God sung by Miriam, Deborah, David, and the prophets

When Mary sang, every Jewish heart within earshot was immediately carried back across the centuries. They heard echoes of the Exodus, the throne of David, the promises to the patriarchs—and suddenly realized: The long-awaited Messiah is here! God has remembered His covenant! The Seed of Abraham, the Son of David, the Holy One of Israel is coming through this young virgin!

That is why her song is drenched in joy. It is not merely personal happiness; it is covenant-fulfillment joy, the joy of seeing every ancient promise burst into bloom in her own womb.

Dr. Jeremiah concludes: “Why the Song of Mary? ... At the beginning of an amazing journey—one no other woman would ever travel—Mary’s focus was in the right place. She knew, and expressed through her song, that the resources of God are unlimited. His strength makes all things possible, and his love makes any burden a joy to bear.”

This Christmas, let the Magnificat fill your heart and your home again.

- Let it remind you that God is still mindful of the humble.
- Let it assure you that He still scatters the proud and lifts up the lowly.

- Let it proclaim afresh that He has kept every promise He ever made—most of all in the Child who was born King of kings in Bethlehem.

Mary's joy is still contagious after 2,000 years because the Savior she carried is still alive, still reigning, and coming again.

So sing with her this Christmas. Magnify the Lord. Let your soul glorify Him and your spirit rejoice in God your Savior—because the Mighty One has done great things for us, and holy is His name... forever. prophets.

Luke 2—Jesus' Birth and Boyhood

A. The world Jesus was born into [2:1-3]

1. A decree from Rome reaches the whole Mediterranean world (1)

It came to pass in those days: Luke clearly tells us that he recorded actual history and real events. This is not “once upon a time.” These are not fanciful stories of Zeus and Apollo on Mount Olympus. This is real.

A decree went out from Caesar Augustus: The story of Jesus' birth began during the reign of one of the most remarkable men of ancient history.

He was born with the name Octavian, named after his father. His grandmother was the sister of Julius Caesar, and being a talented young man, Octavian came to the attention of his great uncle. Julius Caesar eventually adopted Octavian as his son, and he was made his official heir in 45 B.C. Within a year Caesar was murdered, and Octavian joined with two others—Mark Antony and Lepidus—in splitting the domination of Rome three ways. For decades, the whole Mediterranean world was filled with wars and violence; now, under the Triumvirate, it became far worse. There were years of bloody, brutal fighting for power and money in Rome and the provinces.

Octavian and Antony soon pushed Lepidus out of the picture. Even

though his sister married Antony, for thirteen years Octavian and Antony existed together as rivals, until 31 B.C. For a year, their huge armies assembled and positioned themselves. Antony, with the help of Cleopatra, brought 500 warships, 100,000 foot soldiers, and 12,000 cavalry. Octavian answered with 400 warships, 80,000 infantry and 12,000 horsemen. Octavian had the better strategy and the more mobile ships, and he defeated the combined forces of Antony and Queen Cleopatra of Egypt at the battle of Actium. Now Octavian was the sole ruler of the Roman world, and took the title Caesar Augustus.

That all the world: For decades, the world Augustus lived in and Jesus would be born into, the world of the Mediterranean basin, was wrecked by war, destruction, brutality, and immorality.

“The lusty peninsula was worn out with twenty years of civil war. Its farms had been neglected, its towns had been sacked or besieged, much of its wealth had been stolen or destroyed. Administration and protection had broken down; robbers made every street unsafe at night; highwaymen roamed the roads, kidnapped travelers, and sold them into slavery. Trade diminished, investment stood still, interest rates soared, property values fell. Morals, which had been loosened by riches and luxury, had not been improved by destitution and chaos, for few conditions are more demoralizing than poverty that comes after wealth. Rome was full of men who had lost their economic footing and then their moral stability: soldiers who had tasted adventure and had learned to kill; citizens who had seen their savings consumed in the taxes and inflation of war and waited vacuously for some returning tide to life them back to affluence; women dizzy with freedom, multiplying divorces, abortions, and adulteries.” (Durant)

A decree went out from Caesar Augustus: It seemed that the authority of this man changed the chaos of that time in a dramatic way. He brought three things that turned the tide miraculously. First, he brought peace because he had defeated all his rivals. Second, he brought political and administrative skill, perhaps even brilliance. Third, he brought vast sums of money from Egypt to pay the soldiers and to help the Roman economy.

“Jesus was born in the reign of Augustus. After a long period of wars which had racked the Mediterranean and its shores, political unity had

been achieved and the Roman Empire had become roughly coterminous with the Mediterranean Basin. Here and there it was soon to spread beyond it. Augustus was the first Emperor. Building on the foundations laid by his uncle, Julius Caesar, he brought peace and under the guise of the chief citizen of a restored republic ruled the realm which for several generations Rome had been building. The internal peace and order which Augustus achieved endured, with occasional interruptions, for about two centuries. Never before had all the shores of the Mediterranean been under one rule and never had they enjoyed such prosperity. The pax Romana made for the spread of ideas and religions over the area where it prevailed.” (Latourette)

But as great a man as Caesar Augustus was, he was only a man. And the man who brought the answers also took a dear price. He demanded absolute power over the Roman Empire. For hundreds and hundreds of years, Rome prided itself on being a republic—a nation governed by laws, not by any man. The idea that no man was above the law, and the Roman Senate and the army and various political leaders lived together in a sometimes difficult arrangement. Now, Octavius would change all that. In 27 B.C. he arranged for the Roman Senate to give him the title Augustus, which means “exalted” and “sacred.” Now Rome wasn’t a republic, governed by laws; it was an empire governed by an emperor. The first Emperor of Rome was this same Caesar Augustus.

Durant on the title Augustus: “Hitherto the word had been applied only to holy objects and places, and to certain creative or augmenting divinities; applied to Octavian it clothed him with a halo of sanctity, and the protection of religion and the gods.”

One of his early titles was imperator, the commander in chief of all the armed forces of the state. But he came to make the title mean emperor.

This says something important about the world Jesus was born into. It was a world hungry for a savior, and a world that was living in the reign of a political savior—Caesar Augustus—but that wasn’t enough.

“In the century before Christ was born the evidences of disintegration were so palpable in wars, in the passing of the old order, and in moral corruption, that the thoughtful feared early collapse. From this disaster

the Mediterranean Basin was saved by Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar ... [but] we must note that the principate devised by Augustus did not cure but only temporarily halted the course of the disease from which Graeco-Roman culture was suffering.” (Latourette)

“Augustus and his successors had not solved the basic problems of the Mediterranean world. They had obscured them. For what appeared to be a failure in government they had substituted more government, and government was not the answer.” (Latourette)

2. The governor of the Roman administrative region near Galilee (2)

This census: The registration and census described wasn't for simple record-keeping or statistics. It was to efficiently and effectively tax everyone in the Roman Empire.

According to Leon Morris, Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century, said that in his own day (more than a hundred years after the time of Jesus) you could look up the record of the same census Luke mentioned.

First took place: The idea in the original language is that this was “the first enrollment.” Using a census for taxation was common in ancient Rome, so Luke called this one “the first enrollment” to distinguish it from the well-known enrollment in A.D. 6 that he later mentioned in Acts 5:37.

While Quirinius was governing Syria: This is another historical anchor, securing Luke's account with the reign of known, verifiable historical people.

The world responds to the command of Caesar Augustus (3)

So all went to be registered: It is an impressive thought; one man, in the ivory palaces of Rome, gave a command—and the whole world responded. It may well be that up to that point there had never been a man with power over more lives than Caesar Augustus.

Overall, Caesar Augustus was a good ruler. He expanded the territory

of the Roman Empire and he did much for his people. The greatest sorrows of his life came from his home, because he had an out-of-control daughter, no son, and all of his nephews, grandsons, and his favorite stepson died young. But like most every man of such ambition and authority, he thought a lot of himself. It is easy to imagine how invincible he felt when he made a decree ... that all the world should be registered for taxation. It's pretty heady to think, "I make the command and the whole Roman world has to obey it."

But Augustus wasn't really powerful at all. In John 19:10-11, Jesus confronted another Roman who believed he was powerful. Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above." The same principle applied towards Caesar Augustus; whatever power he had was given power, given from God.

As he sat in his palace and made his decree, he thought it was the supreme exercise of his will, the ultimate flexing of his muscle. But he was just a tool in God's hand. God had promised that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and that promised would be fulfilled. So how does one get a young couple from Nazareth down to Bethlehem when they might not be inclined to travel? Simple. Just work through the political "savior of the world," and use him as a pawn in your plan.

We also see that Augustus, for all his accomplishments, couldn't really be the answer. God allowed Caesar Augustus to rise to unheard of human power for many reasons; in some ways, he was like a Roman John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. At the end of the story, what is important is Jesus. Who does the world know more today—Jesus or Caesar Augustus? Who has a more lasting legacy?

Everyone to his own city: There is no record in secular history that Augustus decreed this census and commanded it be performed in this manner, but it was consistent with what we do know of him from history. Augustus was known to be very sensitive to the nationalistic feelings of his subjects, and so he commanded them to return to their cities of family origin for the census.

Barclay and others cite a government edict from a Roman census

commanded in Egypt in the same era, that each person had to go to their own city for the census enrollment.

ii. In this way, Augustus softened the blow for many. They had to travel, they had to pay taxes—but they would also gather together with family, and see relatives that they perhaps had not seen for a long time.

The birth of Jesus [2:4-20]

1. Joseph and Mary come to Bethlehem; Jesus is born (4-7)

a. Joseph also went up from Galilee: The trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem (just outside of Jerusalem) is about 80 miles. This was not a short distance in those days. It was a significant undertaking, costing time and money.

With Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child: We often think that Mary was close to delivery when they made this journey, but this may not have been the case at all. Joseph may have been anxious to get her out of Nazareth to avoid the pressure of scandal. Luke tells us that it was while they were in Bethlehem, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

According to the Roman law, Mary didn't have to go with Joseph for the tax census; but it made sense for her to go with Joseph, especially because she was in the latter stages of a controversial pregnancy—surely the subject of much gossip in Nazareth.

“It is possible that he used the emperor's order as a means of removing Mary from possible gossip and emotional stress in her own village. He had already accepted her as his wife (Matthew 1:24), but apparently continued in betrothal (Luke 2:5), pledged to be married, till after the birth.” (Liefeld)

And she brought forth her firstborn Son: One of the striking things about Luke's narrative is how simple it is in contrast to how great the events are. In our modern age, small events are often inflated with over-description and presented as more important than they actually are. Yet under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke presented this most amazing event in an understated manner.

She brought forth: This phrase is filled with wonder. We are not told that anyone assisted Mary in the birth, though someone may have. One way or another, this young woman was completely separated from all her family and supporting friends, who lived back in Nazareth.

“The narrative runs as if Mary did these things herself, whence the patristic inference of a painless birth.” (Bruce) “That Mary wrapped the child herself points to a lonely birth.” (Morris)

When did this happen? The date of December 25 is improbable but not impossible; this date was first popularized in the church the fourth century.

Where did this happen? In A.D. 150, Justin Martyr said that the place Jesus was born was a cave in Bethlehem. Later (330) under Constantine the Great a church was built over the cave, which many believe is still the most probable place where Jesus was born.

Her firstborn son: This invites the logical conclusion that Mary had other children as well, despite the Roman Catholic dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Wrapped Him in swaddling cloths: These are snugly wrapped strips of cloth. More remarkable than the swaddling cloths is the fact that He was laid in a manger—a feeding trough for animals.

Trapp points out that the word translated swaddling cloths comes from the ancient Greek word meaning “to tear,” meaning they were torn strips of cloth wrapped around Jesus.

There was no room for them in the inn: This happened in a public place, with other travelers and residents. “Men were trafficking, and little children playing, and woman gossiping beside the well—and lo! The kingdom of heaven was among them.” (Morrison)

“That there was no room in the inn was symbolic of what was to happen to Jesus. The only place where there was room for him was on a cross.” (Barclay)

2. Shepherds watch over their flocks (8)

Now there were in the same country shepherds: Bethlehem’s

shepherds were known to care for the temple flock. These men may have also protected and cared for the lambs used in temple sacrifice.

Living out in the fields: Many have said that a late December date is impossible, because shepherds would not have been out at night at that time of year. Nevertheless, warm winters are not unknown in Judea, which has a climate remarkably similar to Southern California.

3. The angelic announcement (9-14)

An angel of the Lord stood before them: Interrupting this quiet, dark night was the shining presence of an angel and the glory of the Lord. This first angel brought good tidings (literally it means that they preached the gospel) to these shepherds, who were regarded as social outcasts.

“As a class shepherds had a bad reputation ... More regrettable was their habit of confusing ‘mine’ with ‘thine’ as they moved about the country. They were considered unreliable and were not allowed to give testimony in the law courts.” (Morris)

“The first preacher of the gospel was an angel. God hath now taken this honour from the angels, and put it upon the ministers, who in Scripture are called angels, Revelation 2:1.” (Trapp)

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior: They announced the birth of a Savior, which was (and is) exactly the need of mankind. We don’t need another advisor, a reformer, or a committee, but a Savior.

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God: After the single angel’s announcement, a whole group of angels appeared. This was a heavenly host (a band of soldiers) that proclaimed peace. The world needed then and needs now peace.

Even the pagans of the first century world sensed this need for peace and a savior. Epictetus, a first century pagan writer, expressed this: “While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy; he cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearn for more than even outward peace.”

The contrast between the angelic glory and the humble Jesus must have seemed extreme. God loves to put His glory in unlikely packages so His glory is more clearly displayed (2 Corinthians 4:7).

iii. “Let God have all the glory, so we may have the peace.” (Trapp)

4. The shepherds come and see the child Jesus (15-16)

Let us now go: This shows a genuine urgency. They didn’t hesitate at all.

And see this thing that has come to pass: The angel told them to look for a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). It wasn’t an unusual sign to see a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, but it was strange to see a baby lying in a manger—a feeding trough. If the angel had not told them to look for such a specific sign, they would never have believed it.

And found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger: This was a strange sight, and the specific sign they were told to look for. They no longer heard or saw angels, but they had the abiding encounter with Jesus. Angels may go, but Jesus remains.

“This was a revolting sight, and was sufficient of itself to produce an aversion to Christ. For what could be more improbable than to believe that he was the King of the whole people, who was deemed unworthy to be ranked with the lowest of the multitude?” (Calvin)

“It is a lovely thought that the shepherds who looked after the Temple lambs were the first to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (Barclay)

5. The shepherds spread the news of Jesus’ birth (17-20)

They made widely know the saying which was told them concerning this Child: The combination of the angelic announcement and the sign of a child in a feeding trough inspired the shepherds to tell as many as they could of what they heard and experienced.

All those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds: The shepherd’s good news amazed all who heard it. Even if they didn’t really understand it, they recognized that something significant had happened.

“God, to show that he respected not persons, revealed this grand mystery to the shepherds and the wise men; the one poor, the other rich; the one learned, the other unlearned; the one Jews, the other Gentiles; the one near, the other far off.” (Trapp)

Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart: Mary’s reaction was different than either the shepherds or those who heard them. She calmly took it all in and meditated over it in her heart, seeking to understand the deep meaning of it all.

“The wonder of the many was a transient emotion (aorist), this recollecting and brooding of Mary was an abiding habit (imperfect).” (Bruce)

Mary had good reason to meditate. What brought her to Bethlehem? A Roman emperor’s great decree and perhaps gossiping tongues in Nazareth. God works through all kinds of people and all kinds of events to accomplish His plan.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told them: The shepherds had such happiness and praise to God because the word was fulfilled just as it was told them.

The Joy of Jesus’s Birth

(10 Glorious Pieces of Joy We Can Glean from Luke 2 and the World into Which Jesus Came)

1 Joy in God’s Perfect Timing. The Roman world was exhausted by decades of war, immorality, and despair, yet in the exact moment when humanity was crying out for a true Savior, God sent His Son. The “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4) had come, and that perfect timing fills our hearts with joy because God is never late.

2 Joy That the Mightiest Emperor Was Only God’s Unknowing Servant. Caesar Augustus thought he was flexing supreme power when he decreed the census, but he was simply moving Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem like a pawn on God’s chessboard to fulfill Micah 5:2. The joy? The One who sits in the heavens laughs (Psalm 2:4); every king and president still serves the purpose of the King of kings.

3 Joy That the Savior Came for a World That Had No Room for Him.

“There was no room for them in the inn” is heartbreaking, yet it is glorious joy, because from the very first breath Jesus identified with the overlooked, the rejected, and the outcasts. He came for everyone who has ever felt there was “no room” for them either.

4 Joy That the First Gospel Sermon Was Preached by an Angel to Social Outcasts. Shepherds were considered unreliable, dishonest, and ceremonially unclean, yet heaven’s first announcement of “good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” went to them. The joy of Christmas shouts is this: Jesus’ guest list always starts with the unlikely and the lowly.

5 Joy That Heaven Could Not Stay Silent. One angel began the message, then suddenly a multitude of the heavenly host exploded in praise: “Glory to God in the highest!” The joy of Jesus’ birth was so overwhelming heaven that all the armies of angels had to sing at once.

6 Joy in the Sign of a Baby in a Feeding Trough. The angel said, “This will be the sign to you: You will find a Baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” The eternal God in a feeding box is the most shocking, humble, approachable sign imaginable. The joy is that the Almighty made Himself small enough for shepherds (and us) to hold.

7 Joy That the Shepherds Ran, Saw, and Couldn’t Stop Telling. They hurried off, found everything exactly as the angel said, and then “made widely known” the good news. The first evangelists after the angels were rough working men who couldn’t keep quiet. Christmas joy is contagious; when you really meet Jesus, you run and tell.

8 Joy That the Lamb of God Was First Seen by Shepherds of Temple Lambs. Many scholars believe these Bethlehem shepherds raised the flocks used for Temple sacrifices. The joy is almost too wonderful: the men who cared for thousands of Passover lambs were the first to see the one true Lamb who would take away the sin of the world.

9. Joy That Mary Treasured and Pondered Every Detail. While everyone else marveled and moved on, Mary “kept all these things

and pondered them in her heart.” There is deep, lasting joy in quietly treasuring the wonders of Christ, letting them sink deeper and deeper year after year.

10 Joy That Every Promise Came Exactly As It Was Told Them. The shepherds “returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.” The greatest joy of all is discovering that every word God spoke about the birth of His Son came true to the letter. Because every promise was fulfilled in the manger, we can trust every promise still waiting to be fulfilled at His return.

This Christmas, let these ten pieces of joy from Luke 2 fill your heart and home: The Savior has come, heaven is still singing, and every detail of God’s Word is proving true, forever. That is joy worth running to tell!

Great Joy: Go Tell It on the Mountain!

When the angel stood before those shepherds, the very first words out of heaven’s mouth were not “Be quiet,” not “Be still,” not even “Behold.”

The very first words were:

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of GREAT JOY that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”

Great joy.

Not mild happiness.

Not polite cheer.

Not “hope things get better.”

GREAT JOY — the kind that makes heaven explode with singing and shepherds drop everything and run through the night.

That same great joy poured out of Mary when she sang, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”

That same great joy made the Magi fall on their faces when the star finally stopped.

That same great joy turned ordinary working men into the world’s first

Christmas evangelists.

And that great joy is still looking for a voice today.

So God gave us the perfect song — simple enough for children, deep enough for angels, urgent enough for shepherds, loud enough for mountains:

Go, tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!
While shepherds kept their watching
O'er silent flocks by night
Behold, throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light

Go, tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!
The shepherds feared and trembled
When high above the earth
Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed our Savior's birth
Go, tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!
Down in a lowly manger
Our humble Christ was born
And God sent us salvation
That blessed Christmas morn
Go, tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born!

This is the sound of Christmas joy — Mary singing it, angels thundering it, shepherds shouting it, wise men living it, and now us carrying it. Every time you feel the great joy rising up in you — in the car, in the kitchen, at the mall, at the school program, around the tree — let it

out the way the shepherds did.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and everywhere you go this season — at work, at Walmart, on your street, on your phone — tell it everywhere:

Jesus Christ is born!

Great joy has come for all people!

That's the song.

That's the mission.

That's the joy.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Program, Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, Guzik, David, Life Application Bible Commentary, Factbook Logos bible, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1995 Guzik, David. 2013. Luke. David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible. Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, "Why the Nativity"- David Jeremiah, "The Birth of the "Tell it Slant" - Peterson, N.T. Wright Commentary, "A Walk with Jesus"- Sproul, John Piper Sermons, "Be Courageous"- Wiersbe, Matthew Henry Commentary, Baker Exegetical Commentary Book, "The Joy of Christmas"- Swindoll

Sermon Notes:

The Joy of Christmas

Good Morning and Merry Christmas Everyone... Can you believe it... We are officially 11 days away from Christmas Morning...

Let me give some Christmas shopping advice... I know, coming from me—shocking!!

You know on your phone how you can select the store you're looking for something at... it tells you the quantity... Don't trust it!!

You would never imagine having a hard time finding a Christmas tree stand... Good luck if you're trying to find something for a 10-12 foot tree...

The store said 7 in stock... I even called and the guy said 7 in stock... Praise God there was 1 left...
What a beautiful tree...

Here are the AVC Connections before we hop into the Word...

YouTube, App, Facebook / Website

[Let's Pray]

We are in a series titled: The Joy of Christmas

I titled today's sermon: "The Three Sounds of Christmas Joy"

The hustle and bustle of running around during the Christmas season can drain your batteries...

Let's be honest... Trying to please everyone is stressful and challenging...

Shoppers now have a huge advantage over what us older folks used to have to endure... You can shop online!!

[Story of Tradition: Birthdays on the 11th, 12th, 13th]

My most memorable Christmas present we ever gave our kids one year was a white Boxer puppy...

I'll never forget the sound of joyous screams when we released him into the room...

Here are some older pics when Bo was around a year old... (Dog Pics)

All of that is great... But true joy can't be found in a Christmas box...

Biblically speaking, joy is different than fun, happiness, and laughter...

Joy, taken from the Hebrew and Greek languages, literally means: A deep and steady gladness; an inner strength that comes from knowing we belong to the Lord... and that His Holy Spirit's presence is with us; even on hard days and seasons when everything is not going perfectly. Our joy flows from receiving God's grace... His everlasting grace...

If you want to have more joy in your life, let me give you some suggestions with Scripture:

Stop taking life so seriously... Laugh more and trust the Lord more.

Proverbs 17:22 A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Spend less time at work and more time with the people you love.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 “Two are better than one... If one falls, the other is there to help him up.”

Invest deeply in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

John 15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Invest intentionally in your marriage and closest relationships.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

My last suggestion—BTW there are more in the app

Let your hair down—Life is meant to be enjoyed, not just endured.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.

Friends, when God brings salvation, we hear the sounds of joy break forth.

After David killed Goliath and the Israelites were freed joy sounded its song:

1 Samuel 18:6 When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes.

When the Jews finished rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem after 70 years of exile... Joy sounded its song.

Ezra 6:22 For seven days they celebrated with joy the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because the LORD had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria, so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

When God's Word was read after the holy walls were rebuilt Joy sounded its song.

Nehemiah 8:10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks... This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

When God announced the Messiah's birth... Jesus Christ our Lord... we hear three sounds of Christmas joy that will conclude our sermon today.

1. We hear heaven's angels exploding with song

Luke 2:8-14 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

2. We hear the sound of shepherds running

Luke 2:18-20 All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered

them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

3. We hear the Magi falling on their faces

Matthew 2:1-2 & 9-11

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Friends, Jesus is the Joy of Christmas!!

Stand with me as we close in prayer.

Devotional Questions & Reflections

Read the devotional, questions and applicable passages below, and engage in the questions. May you feel the joy of Jesus growing inside of you!

1. Luke 2:10 – “Good news of great joy ... for all the people”

When was the last time you personally felt the “great joy” that the angel announced? What tends to steal that joy from your heart during the Christmas season, and how can you intentionally return to the simple truth that Jesus came for YOU?

2. Luke 2:11 & John 15:11 – “A Savior ... that your joy may be complete”

Jesus said His joy would be in us and make our joy complete. Where in your life right now do you need the Savior to fill an empty or hurting place? Take a moment and name it to Him—then thank Him that His

joy is bigger than that situation.

3. Luke 2:20 - The shepherds “returned, glorifying and praising God”

The shepherds didn’t stay at the manger; they went back to ordinary life praising. What would it look like for you to carry the same praise and wonder into your workplace, your home, or your shopping trips this week?

4. Proverbs 17:22 & 1 Peter 5:7 - “A cheerful heart is good medicine ... Cast all your anxiety on Him”

Which feels heavier right now—your Christmas to-do list or the joy of knowing Jesus cares for you? Write down one specific anxiety you can cast on Him today, and replace it with one thing that makes you laugh or smile on purpose.

5. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 & 1 Peter 4:8 - Relationships that multiply joy

Who is one person (spouse, child, friend, church family member) you could intentionally invest in this week with no agenda except love? How might deepening that relationship increase the joy in both of your lives?

6. Nehemiah 8:10 - “The joy of the Lord is your strength”

When the wall was finished and the people heard God’s Word, joy became their strength. Think of a recent trial or long project you’ve walked through. How can remembering God’s faithfulness in that situation give you fresh strength and joy right now?

7. John 10:10 & Matthew 2:10 - Abundant life and being “overjoyed”

The Magi were overjoyed when they saw the star again, and Jesus said He came so we could have life “to the full.” What is one simple way this week you can “let your hair down” and enjoy the abundant life Jesus died to give you—something that reminds you life with Him is meant to be celebrated, not just endured?