

A Season of More

ADVENT AT DOXA 2023

A SEASON OF MORE: YOUR DEEPEST JOY

December 10, 2023

Justin Kim

Luke 2:8-12:

The holiday season is a wonderful time for everyone to gather with our loved ones, hopefully get at least a little time away from work or school, and focus on what really matters. But what does really matter? What do you need most this holiday season? Is it some good news, something to look forward to? Is it a break from the anxiety and chaos of life? Is it a happiness or contentment that doesn't fade so quickly? Or maybe just to be seen and celebrated by others? Whether you choose hope, peace, joy, or love, all four of these are offered to us this season. This advent, let's explore our needs for hope, peace, joy, and love, and why the best gifts come not from consumption, but from a baby in a manger a long time ago. Go to doxa-church.com to learn more about Doxa, find service times, or support the making of disciples in the everyday stuff of life.

Good morning, Doxa. Today we'll be reading Luke 2, verses 8 through 12.

"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.'"

This is the Word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Well, it's good to see you guys. My name is Justin. I'm one of the pastors here. It's been a several, it's been several months since I've preached here. I'm here, I'm just upstairs a lot, so,

and we've got such great preachers at our church, but they got me off the bench today to preach. And it's good to see the Justin Kim pulpit. I have not grown since June of last year, like my hair. So it's good to be at this good level. This, the other pulpit is too tall for me, so it's good to be here and to use this pulpit. I'm honored to share the word with you. We've been in a series here at Doxa in the Advent series about just the deep desires that we have for hope, peace, joy, and love.

And today I'd like for us to consider our deepest joy and where does it come from? And from the outset, I wanna just share my outline, just very simple, the problem with joy. And secondly, the answer to joy. Very simple because I don't think this is a complex, a profound thing that we need to consider. Sometimes the greatest truth is simple truth and just applying that into our lives. But I do wanna begin with this understanding of this, the problem with joy. I want you to consider the problem that is, there, the challenges of experiencing the joy of God in our lives. Because it is an issue. If there's a single word that describes this time of the year, the Christmas season, it's the word joy. And if you think about it, several of our favorite songs this time of the year mention it. I mean, I listen to the Christmas music in the car all the time now. Joy to the world, the world is come. Or come, all ye faithful, joyful, and triumphant. Or consider this song, Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong/ There's lots more, there's a lot more. I don't have time to mention all the songs that's there regarding joy. We sing and hear these songs, but I wonder how many of us actually feel joyful this morning. I mean, we sing joy to the world, but often that's not reality. That's not true in our hearts. We're not experiencing it in that moment. And I think that's one of the reasons that we have this issue, this problem of joy, isn't it? Because despite the songs, it's not always easy to feel joyful. Part of the problem is that, you know, we connect joy with happenings and feelings and circumstances. We think that joy depends on our situations and happenings in life. So when things are going really well in your life, you are happy. When circumstances and situations are good, you are happy, and happiness is a great thing. It's a great emotion. I'm happy if you're happy, but it's just that, it's just a feeling. It's just a feeling. And feelings are connected to what's happening in your life. And so one moment you can be on the mountaintop, and the next moment when you get some type of news, you can find yourself emotionally in the deepest valley, so fickle tossed about by the winds and waves of life and situations that come your way. So oftentimes things are not going well in your life. Isn't that the reality? And add to that, the world today, I mean, it feels like a pretty scary place because of wars and the economy and other challenges that we see or read about. And of course, there are individual things that some of us are experiencing. I don't wanna minimize that. Financial stress, serious illness, family difficulties and more, all of which are present in our church, just like any other community. I mean, there are real struggles and hardships and challenges, you find yourself in a deep valley or dark storm. So it's hard to be happy when your circumstances are not good, because we live in a broken world. And that's the reality. Let me just give a real talk and be really vulnerable with you. I didn't wanna preach today. I wanted to ask Pastor Eddie, can I preach on another Sunday, can I actually change the topic instead of joy? Because how do you preach something that sometimes you don't feel? And I wanted to ask him, can I preach on struggle? Let me, I'm an expert on the topic of sin. Lemme preach on sin. I can go to town, I can get a home run on that. But joy, man, that is a hard topic. So I'm really mad at Eddie this morning. But let's, that's another message for

another day. But you know, for some, the Christmas season can be really hard. Why? Because for those that we miss. I mean, loved ones that have passed on, families fractured, no longer together, relationships that are broken and no longer together, I mean, it brings us pain during this time of the year. Pain that maybe others don't even understand. And joy is missing. There's an absence of it. And no matter how we try to create it or generate it with all the decorations and, you know, holiday cheer, we know in our heart of hearts, it's not genuine and it's not real. I think about the Apostle Paul as he writes in the book of Philippians in chapter four, verse four,

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say rejoice."

Paul, by the way, was in prison when he wrote this. His circumstances certainly was not good. There should have been a lack of joy. And yet, here is Paul rejoicing and calling others to joy. Why? Because his joy wasn't being found in the best of circumstances. It wasn't based on good things happening in his life. And consider this, Jesus never promised happiness, but he did promise joy. Our text doesn't say, I bring good news, a great happiness. No, it doesn't say that, right? There's a reason why the word here is what it is, joy. And the angel's announcement is this, I bring you good news of great joy. So then where does this joy come from? How do we experience it, especially in a broken world, when things don't always go our way? When we're looking for this joy in all the wrong places, and it says that an angel appeared and made this incredible announcement to the shepherds, I bring you good news of great joy. The angel is saying, I'm bringing good news of great joy. In other words, think about this. Joy is not from this world. You see, joy cannot be found in this world. Joy to the world, joy to you. It has to break down from above. It has to burst from the outside in. It has to be brought to you, given to you. And we're looking for this joy. It's not to be found here, or even when our eyes are on ourselves and looking inside. I was meditating on Hebrews 11 the other day, and in that chapter in verses 13 and 14, this is what it says,

"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland."

Now, just in very fast perusing of that passage, in this passage, it's not hard to see that, that we are given a, we are given a narrative of life. God says that we are all what? Exiles and strangers. In essence, we are wandering, we are homeless, we are not yet home. And yet, I think part of the issue is because I am trying to make this my home, trying to find all there is in terms of contentment and joy in this world. And the Bible is saying, if you are a child of God, no, no, no. This is not our home. And yet we put all of our eggs in this basket. I mean, do you agree and accept the Bible's narrative for you? Because if you don't accept what the Bible says is true of you, the tendency is that you just go on complaining and blaming others for your problems or for your joylessness, maybe your spouse if you're married or your kids who don't turn out right, or the traffic, your job, the lack of promotion or security, your health, your beauty, all the conflicts, all the conditions and all the circumstances surrounding you. Because deep down in your hearts, you still expected whatever it is that you were looking at to deliver and sustain great joy. An angel announced though, listen, I'm gonna bring down joy. I'm gonna give you joy.

And the rest of us are sitting here like, I'm still trying to find it. I'm gonna create it. I'm gonna make it. I'm gonna protect it. I'm gonna find something that's really, that will really satisfy my soul. There is a long running sitcom Seinfeld, I love that show. There's a character named George Costanza, and he's got a father named Frank. And Frank makes up his own holiday called Festivus. And he celebrates Festivus. Festivus his own made up holiday where he just basically airs out all of his grievances and complaints and all the ways people around him are disappointing him. It's pretty traumatic actually. And he tells George, you're such a disappointment to his son, right? And it's all the way the people around him have, you know, just just he's just complaining about people and circumstances. But on a podcast for The Daily Beast, the former Seinfeld writer by the name of Dan O'Keefe explained that that's, that's not fictional, Festivus, but it's real life. And it has its origins in the O'Keefe household. Dan O'Keefe, you see, he had a bipolar father, alcoholic father who was at times very scary, very abusive, and very violent. And his father invented Festivus where he would just really air out grievances for the year. And also speak of his disappointment of those around him, especially his own son. Russell Moore, a Christian author, wrote an article entitled, for many people today, it's always Festivus and Never Christmas. It's always Festivus.

Is that you this morning in your heart, friends? Time to just air out grievances your bitterness at the world. Oh, on the outside you look great, you look, you guys look beautiful, but what's going on in the inside? But never Christmas, festivity, despair, grief, sadness, anger, whatever you think is the opposite of joy. You, you don't experience genuine joy. There is no mega joy, this great joy that we see here in our passage today. And you know, sometimes I, I use humor in a comedic way just to mask trauma or sadness and pain. This author turned it into comedic material for Seinfeld. And people are laughing at Festivus and maybe they're laughing because in their hearts, it's true of them. And you know what other things mask reality of trauma and pain and the joylessness in people's lives is maybe it's busyness, mass consumption, materialism, decorations, religion. Yeah. A lot of people get very religious to somehow hide and pretend that life is not as brutal as it really is. And I wonder behind that smile and manufacture joy, if you're really feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, beaten down, more cynical than before, more disillusioned and depressed, sad, despair, sorrowful, there's a grief that you're feeling as joyless. Life is hard. And that's the reality. And you know, the usual explanations and the storylines that everyone goes, you know, kind of uses, you know, goes something like this. They say to me, oh, hey, pastor Justin, pastor Jay Rock, pastor Stud puppy, I don't know. I'm looking forward to the new year. I'm so excited for this new year. Let's turn the calendar over to the new year. 2024 is gonna be my year, because if only this happened last year, I'd be conquering the world. And whatever didn't happen this past year, will for sure happen this year. And, and I think, I wonder if deep down in your heart you think that there are reasons for why you don't have great joy. And if you think things like this. Only if I get this dot, dot, dot, if I can accomplish this, dot, dot, dot, or if this turned out a certain way in my favor, or if that conflict was resolved, or if I got healthier and stronger, if that guy or girl was in my life, if I got that house, that promotion, or if my marriage just turned around. Oh, God is my witness, you will find a very joyful, joyful person in me. But again, the Bible tells us that not only are we exiles and strangers, and we are not yet home, but the Bible goes further and predicts something for us. Here's what the Bible predicts. You can get everything you want. Everything could turn out exactly as you'd

hope for. You can get your top 20 lists, wish lists of the year, and everything gets fulfilled. But here's what, here's what the Bible predicts. You will still have a momentary happiness that is fleeting, fleeting, short-lived, temporary, fading. It will fade and be gone in a moment. Why? Friends, because life cannot deliver all that you wanted it to while you are homesick. Listen, friends, did you know, and do you understand the nature of your life? Do you understand the nature of this fallen world? This world has everything and yet has nothing for us as a people of God. Do you understand reality? And this is reality, right? That you can get everything you want and still come up empty. You can accomplish and experience, be enthralled with all kinds of wealth and possessions and pleasures, and still come up empty and bitter. You can gain the whole world, right, the Bible says, but your soul will be perishing because life cannot deliver all that you want it to. Life cannot handle the messianic expectations because it was never meant to. This is why the angel announced lo and behold, why Jesus had to be born. There's a child over there in a manger. You see, he is the only one who can bring good news filling you with great joy. Nothing, nothing else will ever satisfy your deepest desires and the needs of your heart. Nothing. Not the best marriage. Even if your marriage was picture perfect. Ask my wife Virginia. She says our marriage is perfect. She's married an almost a perfect guy, right? But good thing she's not here 'cause you can't ask her 'cause she's sick at home. And so, but you know, even if your marriage is perfect, picture perfect, it would not be able to sustain great joy. Your kids become celebrities, rock stars, superstars will not give you great joy. You could have the best skin, you can have the best health you can have the best job you can have the best influence, the most, I don't know, following. You can have the best of science and technology. You can have the best of everything that could be had, even for a pastor. You can have the best church and ministry and the best of gifts, joy, we all wanted. However, we often pursue it in the wrong places, which can be exhausting and draining and futile.

Do you accept the Bible's narrative that we are not yet home? And even if you got everything, you got great joy, you would still miss out on that. So what do we do? What's the secret to joy? The solution. So I want you to consider the answer to joy. The answer to joy. I wanna look at our passage again. And even before verse four, Joseph, he had a very impressive lineage. He's from the house of David. He goes to register himself. And Mary, he's betrothed is with child. That should be good news, should be great news. But it's not for them right now 'cause they're in, it's a scandalous imagery that they have because they're betrothed. But she's with child. And having a baby is usually a joyful thing. But when you consider the fact that they're betrothed, pledged to be married, but with child is a scandalous thing. Mary, Joseph had a lot of probably grief and fear and just they didn't know what was going on. It was probably a good time that they actually had to go away for the census to be away from their home, to avoid the scandal, the gossiping and the emotional stress. And when the baby finally arrives again, having a baby is joyful, right? But there are no proper accommodations. Verse seven says that there was no place for them in the inn. They didn't even have a proper place to lay the baby in. So they used a feeding trough for an animal to place Jesus. Swaddling cloths. It comes from a Greek word to tear. This means that they were using torn strips of clothing wrapped around Jesus. Everything about this birth, if you think about it, is improper, inappropriate, and unbecoming, unfitting for a king. Verse eight says,

"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."

Bethlehem shepherds, by the way, were known to care for the temple flock, often used for temple sacrifices. It's ironic that this great news about the birth of the great shepherd who is born to ultimately die, to be our sacrifice as the unblemished lamb of God is given to these lowly shepherds, watching lambs to be used in sacrifice. These shepherds who were regarded by the way as social outcasts. And then when the angels appeared to them and made this announcement again, verse 10 to 12,

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people... for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

So interrupting this dark night, an angel in the glory of the Lord appears. The first angel brought literally good tidings, which literally means that the angel preached gospel to these shepherds, preached the gospel. And the answer to the problem of joy, is this, good news of great joy. Verse 11,

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord?"

This is the gospel. In essence, the words good news literally means the gospel. And this is what it is. The Savior, who is Christ, the Lord, has come, has come, has been brought to you, given to you. The words good news literally means the gospel.

And this is what it is. The Savior, who is Christ, the Lord, has come. A savior who was and is exactly what we need. We don't need another advisor, a reformer or committee, but a savior. We need a savior. And the Savior when he is the focus, not just the feeling, but he's the focus, the perspective, the meditation of our hearts becomes the source of our joy. You see, joy is a big thing in the Bible. The Hebrews talk about joy as a vivid thing. It's a root word, it means to shine, to be bright. The word joy in the Greek means it's describing a feeling of inner gladness, delight, and inner reaction based on a spiritual truth of reality. But there's more to it than that. Charles Spurgeon, a great Baptist preacher, defined it like this from the scriptures. Joy comes not from what they have, but from what they are, not from where they are, but from whose they are, not from what they enjoy, but from that which will suffer for them by their Lord.

In short, joy is a result of knowing Jesus Christ. Joy is the fruit of being loved and loving Jesus Christ. It's the fruit of the Holy Spirit found in Galatians chapter five. Love, joy, peace. It's a supernatural gift. Can I ask you this morning, couple of questions. Do you have a clear conscience? Do you know all your deceit, all of your hypocrisy and corruptions and sins and white lies have been buried to death? Do you know that you can stand before a holy perfect God and still, and still be accepted and approved? Do you have the assurance of the forgiveness of all of your sins, your sins, not other people's sins? Do you enjoy being infinitely loved? Do you know that you are intimately belonging to, adopted by, delighted over, protected, prayed over, and that he never loses a sight over you because God in heaven now is your father? The late great J. I. Packer, Christian philosopher, professor and author used to say that these things that

I just mentioned to you, that Christians should tell themselves every single day. So I started to do that often. And lo and behold, joy begins to grow in my own heart. Another statement by J. I. Packer encourages believers to say often to themselves is a statement of heaven is my home. Is heaven your home? Or are you just passing through? Are you passing through joy for whom though? Joy for whom? Look at verse 10. And the angels said to them, fear not for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. The Greek provides one central word for joy. It's Chara, it's the cousin, has a connection to Chara is, which is a New Testament word for grace. Biblical joy is about experiencing and receiving and embracing the grace of God. The grace of God. Notice again what the verse says. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. All the people, every single person who can hear the good news. The good news can bring you great joy. And here's why. Because it comes by grace. You don't need to earn it. You don't need to buy it. You can't. Oh no, I'm not British. You can't create it. You can't create it. You cannot manufacture it. You cannot perform for it. It comes by grace. The solution and the answer, the antidote to the problem of joy is grace. And the reason why we can be filled with this mega joy is the grace of God. Because Christmas joy is for all people. Because it comes by grace. Great joy, mega joy can fill all people. Why? Only way it can come to all people, the only way Christianity or Christian faith is the most cosmopolitan global religion in all the history and still going forth is because it is by grace. You see, what does the angel show? Who does the angel show up to first? Yeah, it's easy. Verse eight. And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. Who does the angel, who does the angel show up to first? Not a celebrity, not a TikTok star, not an influencer, not an influential or cultural political business elite. The angels showed up to the shepherds just doing their job on a cold, bitter, winter's night. God appeared to them. And it wasn't like they were seeking Jesus, it, they weren't doing anything but going about their work at night. Nothing they were doing warranted in being the recipient of such great favor. An announcement, such great news of great joy. These lowly shepherds are the receivers of grace. The angel appeared to them and God appeared to them. It was in a manger, in a manger, a baby born of an unwed, scandalized teenager. She was pregnant before she was married. They were poor, they were marginalized. There were, they had nowhere else to go. And this young couple, Mary and Joseph, they didn't ask for this. They weren't seeking God in this way. And yet God came to them in baby Jesus. Such grace.

Listen, you will not find Jesus in the Ritz Carin in some downtown city. You're not gonna find him in the popular centers. You're not gonna find him anywhere there. No, but where was he born at first? God meets you in person, in a lowly dirty manger. Here's what grace means. Are you ready for this? Here's what grace means for you and me. You could feel like you're the worst person in the room right now. No one knows your history. You know your history. You know your treachery, you know your sins, your abuse, the crime. And even if you feel like you're the worst person in this world in this room, but compared on the surface, the most respectable religious person in this room, you both have an equal chance, exact equal chance. That's what grace means. The fantastic story of Christmas is not that we should try and get ourselves organized and put together and perhaps make ourselves acceptable to God, but rather that God has come in the person of Jesus as our greatest gift and to drench us and to soak us, to inundate us with undeserved grace. Grace also means that God is more attracted to

you right now this morning, not because you're doing well. God is more attracted to those on a cold, lonely, bitter night in your loneliness, in your brokenness. Maybe something that has happened in your family that you don't wanna share with anybody yet. God is more attracted to you in scary situations and shameful situations down, even in downright sinful situations. Despite sin and shame. Grace means that God wants to move towards you. That is what the good news that brings great joy is all about. And joy comes to anyone, anyone. It doesn't matter who you are. We should stop talking about our history and our pedigree. We should stop chatting and talking about our resume and CV and how well we're doing in our jobs. We should stop talking about our accounts and our stocks and our future security. We should stop talking about our homes and our possessions 'cause it doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter who your family was. It doesn't matter what kind of falling out you've had. It doesn't matter how broken or failed you feel deep down in here. It doesn't, it doesn't, it doesn't matter at all. Good news of great joy. It can be yours today right now because it all comes by grace. And grace says God will meet you right where you are. He will show up to you when you feel like the most marginalized, outcast, or the unlovable person in the world when you do get this, but when Jesus comes and gives you this joy from the grace of God. Do you have it?

I don't know what your holiday plans are for Christmas. This time of the year, many of y'all go on vacation for Christmas and New Year's and things like that. If you're gonna go to Hawaii, lemme try to fit into your suitcase, I'd love to go with you. I hope you have a great time. I hope you'll be careful in your travels. And if you do travel, I hope you'll come back rested and rejuvenated and ready to launch into the new year with the fresh energy and vitality that only Christ can provide, really. As you think about your travels, think about this. You know, on this Christmas, let me remind you, for some of you, maybe for the first time ever, Jesus had travel plans as well. And he went as far away from home as he could. He left his father, he came down here into our world, our life on this planet, and he was utterly devastated and ruined. John 3:16, you know it well, maybe,

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

And what gift expresses the vast unmeasured, boundless, free love of God? What gift possibly could describe the dimensions of the way God loves us? God so loved the world that he gave his only son, his only son. So Jesus traveled, he came into the world. Joy to the world. The Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room. Joy is yours at the reception of a king. Joy is yours by believing in a savior Jesus Christ, to take you out of this independent, autonomous, joyless, sinful living. May God be your end and your joy then, have no end joy to the world. Because he lost. He was drained in full. Oh, but he has risen again guys. He's risen again to take you by the hand to give you a whole new life that is experiencing joy. John 1 says this,

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God who were born not of blood nor the will of the flesh nor the will of man, but of

God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

I shared with you that I didn't wanna preach this message, and I realized it's because I was looking for joy in the wrong places myself. I'm still doing that today. Man, how I need the grace of God every single day of my life. I know it theologically in my head, and yet and again and again, sinfully, and without wisdom, without discipline, I often go elsewhere for my source of joy. My focus is on so many other things, than on the reality of Jesus coming into the world. Truth be told, I don't deserve his joy. Truth be told, you don't either, not Mary and Joseph, certainly not those low level shepherds. But here's a secret in the power of God's joy. It is by grace. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. It can't be created, manufactured, produced, and bought. It has to come outside of you. It has to be received and experienced by this good news that Jesus has come to be born to ultimately die for our sins and all of it by grace. Come and get this joy. Come and savor this joy. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your grace, for the joy that was set before you. You went to the cross, not because the experience of the cross was joyful and not because you enjoyed the suffering. No, because you look beyond that and the guaranteed accomplishment that would come about the joy that was set before you, which was the salvation of your people. Father, help us this Christmas season, all the more, to take the eyes off of ourselves and to not find joy in the things of this world, but to focus on the gospel, on you, Jesus, and the grace that you've poured into our lives. And as the Holy Spirit begins to do that work, and to the degree that the gospel and the grace of God, your grace penetrates our hearts. I believe that we will experience mega joy in our lives, that goes beyond our situations and circumstances. Oh God, let it be so. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.