

# Long Expected Jesus

Sunday, Dec 26, 2021

Kyle Rodriguez

## I. Introduction

Good morning, Union Church. My name is Kyle Rodriguez, and I am one of the pastors here.

*Would you pray with me?*

Christmas is war.

I don't mean shopping for Christmas presents is war—especially not when you do all your shopping online. I don't mean that fighting to maintain sanity is war.

I mean that Christmas, the act of God himself coming into this world in the form of a human baby, was an act of war.

The Bible teaches us that at the very beginning of humanity's history, the first humans were tempted by an evil serpent, the Devil, to disobey their Creator and place themselves at the center of creation. And their rebellion, their sin, had cosmic consequences that plunged this world into darkness and death, that trapped humanity in a cycle of sin and pain and suffering.

But at Christmas, we celebrate that God chose to invade a world of darkness with a piercing beam of light. We celebrate that holiness itself came into a lowly human body in order to defeat sin and death. We celebrate that God sent his one and only Son to crush the head of the serpent and free his people from their bonds.

Christmas was an act of war.

The birth of Jesus Christ was not, itself, peaceful. I am not sure what I expected when my wife Ashley and I had our first child this year, but nothing that I could have expected could have prepared me for the WAR that occurs when a child is born.

No human birth is silent and cute and easy. It's bloody and painful and messy and hard.

And Jesus's life that followed his birth would be bloody and painful and messy and hard. Because Jesus didn't come into this world to accomplish peace on earth and goodwill toward men simply by inspiring people to live more superficially kind lives. Jesus came to win a war!

Jesus came to conquer Satan. Jesus came to annihilate sin and evil! Jesus came to defeat death itself!

Christmas was an act of war.

If you haven't kept your Bibles open, I want to encourage you to turn back to Isaiah 9.

## **II. Jesus came for joy.**

Isaiah 9, which you just heard read, in its original context, is a promise made to the people of Israel, God's chosen people in the Old Testament. This is written about 700 years before Jesus would eventually be born, and spoiler alert, Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy. But at the time this was written, Israel was surrounded by foreign nations that were constantly threatening to overtake them. Internally, Israel was in chaos. They were a divided people, they were a people marked by hypocrisy and sin, many of them had strayed from worshipping God. They were a fearful people, their leaders were untrustworthy and their future was uncertain.

Does that hit a little too close to home?

And it is in the midst of that context, in the midst of guilt and shame, of uncertainty and fear, of division and feeling unfulfilled, that the Lord sends his people this promise.

Verse 1:

**But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali (that is, the land of Israel), but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.**

**<sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.**

**<sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.**

Stop right there: Why is God moving? Why is he working? Why is he intervening, invading, interrupting? Why is he engaging in war?

For joy! For his people's joy!

Over the last few weeks, we have been looking at Christmas, and the Advent season that leads up to Christmas, through the lens of longing.

All of us have longings, unfulfilled desires and hopes that drive us to disappointment, frustration, anxiety, division, and apathy. It is part of our nature as human beings who exist in a broken world. for justice, for peace, for security, for success, for meaning, for companionship, for love. We want these things, but we don't fully and rightly possess them, and so we are filled with a deep sense of longing.

But once we've identified some of our longings, that something is missing, then we need to start looking for something to satisfy those desires, to fill these huge gaps within us. Because every desire within us is meant to be satisfied. The things that are wrong are meant to be right.

C.S. Lewis has expressed this most profoundly, I think. He says this in his book *Mere Christianity*<sup>1</sup>:

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water...

So, what Lewis is saying is that longing is meant to point us to a source of fulfillment. And if we can't find that fulfillment, the most likely explanation is that we are looking in the wrong places for satisfaction. He goes on to say:

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

Friends, each of us have longings that never seem to be satisfied. Our longings for justice, for peace, for security, for success, for meaning, for companionship, for love—all of those longings can be summed up under one umbrella: We long for joy. We long to be happy.

And not just cheap, temporary pleasure, or .

We want lasting, secure, overflowing delight that bubbles up from deep within you. I'm talking about the feeling that's mixed with awe when you finally get to the top of a mountain hike and look out onto the valley below. I'm talking about the deep sense of giddiness mixed with peace that springs up when you look around your dinner table at your family laughing together and you're not worrying about how you're going to pay the bills this month. I'm talking about the uncontrollable urge to leap up and shout when your team hits a home run or springs a long touchdown run.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity* (1952, reprinted New York, Harper One, 2000), 136-137.

That's joy!

And Christmas, Jesus Christ coming to earth is meant to be for that joy! That's what the prophet Isaiah is saying here!

Think about the stories that the rest of Bible tells about Jesus's birth.

When Mary found out that she was going to bear a son, the Son of God, who would be the Messiah, she went to her cousin Elizabeth's home and Elizabeth said: "My baby leaped for **joy**" when you walked in (Luke 1:44). And when Mary heard this affirmation from Elizabeth, that this baby really was the one God had promised, she started singing, and she started praising the Lord, she said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!" (Luke 1:46-47).

When the angel appeared to the shepherds outside Jerusalem, he said: "Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great **joy** that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10) When the wisemen saw the star come to a stop over the house where Mary and Joseph were staying, they "rejoiced exceedingly with great **joy**" (Matt. 2:10).

Jesus came for the sake of your joy.

### **III. Jesus came to establish a kingdom that would last forever.**

Jesus came to increase the joy of his people, we see that clearly in verse 2, now, look at the next few verses. In my translation, every one of the next three verses starts with the word "for".

And that word "for" is an important one. It is an explanatory word, like "because". So, all three of these verses are explaining further, how the people's joy is going to be increased. In the first "for" we see that justice will be served, oppression will be halted, and God's people will be saved. In the second "for" we see that peace will be made, and all weapons and tools of war will be destroyed, for there will never be need for them again.

And then we get the final "for," the ultimate reason explanation of how joy will be accomplished:

**For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
7 Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.**

For to us, a child is born, to us a son is given. It is interesting, isn't it, that in order to turn back the tides of injustice, brokenness and death, God utilizes not an instrument of death but an origin of life? God's weapon of choice in this cosmic conflict is an infant.

Because that baby was no mere human child. He was God himself, the wise and wonderful counselor, the powerful and mighty God himself, the everlasting Father! He is going to establish a perfect, joy-filled kingdom that lasts forever and ever!

And not only that, but that baby, who himself was also God, would subject himself to horrific suffering and even death, in order to make a way for you and for me to enter in to that perfect, joyful kingdom. All of it, is going to be accomplished by this child, this son. This child is given to establish a kingdom of joy, and to make a place for US in that kingdom—to US a child is born.

In fact, Christ was given to us in the fullest possible extent, being willing not only to be born as a lowly infant, but to give even his very life for our joy on the cross, to purchase our ticket into his eternal kingdom. To us the Son was given.

#### **IV. Jesus comes by the zeal of the Lord of hosts.**

But I want to zero in on the final sentence of this incredible passage. Because this is a great promise that God is giving his people.

How can we be sure these promises will come true? How can we be sure that Jesus really will set up an everlasting kingdom?

##### **The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.**

The “zeal”, the “passion”, the “jealousy” of the Lord. This is the ultimate foundation for our hope, that the promises of the Lord really will come true: Because he is zealous to do so.

He is zealous to keep his promises because he is a faithful God. He is zealous to end all wars because he is a God of peace. He is zealous to deliver his people from unjust oppression because he is a God of justice. And ultimately, he is zealous for his people's joy because he is love personified.

Do you think about God as someone who cares about your joy?

When you picture God, do you picture a young father trying everything to make his infant son laugh? Do you picture a single mother working two jobs so her kids can get into a good school? Do you picture a husband who works in the garage every night to craft the custom countertop his wife always wanted? Do you picture the grandparents who pull out all the stops every time their grandchildren come to town?

Is that what comes into your mind when you think of God? Or do you think of the stingy God? The God who is withholding, who is waiting for you to perform at the right level before he acts?

Friends, the God of the Bible is a God who orchestrated Christmas because he was zealous for your joy.

He sent his Son to humble himself, to become a creature, so that he could suffer every trial and temptation that you do, but be without sin. He sent his Son to be born in a barn, so he could be killed on a cross, to take the punishment for your sins and purchase forgiveness for you. He sent that infant child down to earth so one day he could raise him up from the grave to resurrection and glory, giving you a picture of what waits for you if you put your faith in him.

All of it was done for your joy. It wasn't done merely for your benefit, it was also done for the glory of God, but that's a whole other sermon. Today, just hear what that same baby would tell his disciples just before he died: "These things I have spoken to you, that my **joy** may be in you, and that your **joy** may be full." (John 15:11).

Christmas was an act of war, the first wave in a war that was fought and won for your joy.

## **V. Application: Followers of Christ enter into daily war for his joy.**

If you're a follower of Christ today, then your job is to fight for joy \*in\* Christ. The joy that will never grow old and disappear into nostalgia, but, will grow more and more intense as you come to know him more and one day culminate in a radiant, ever-increasing fountain of overflowing joy as you spend eternity in the place he has prepared for you. That is the joy that God sent his Son to earth for, the joy that God is zealous for, the joy that he has fought and bled for.

But, the fight for joy looks different depending on your context. You can't fight a war in the jungle the same way you fight a war in the countryside.

### **Some of you have had a wonderful, joy-filled Christmas season.**

You're not ignoring the hardships in the world right now, but you love the stockings and the presents and the family and the traveling. Maybe this season of life is a particularly enjoyable one. Maybe your job is secure, your kids are in a really fun stage. Maybe you just got a gift or two on Christmas that you can't wait to read, watch, or use.

In other words, this season in your life doesn't fill you with a ton of future longing as much as it is a season of delighting in present, earthly joys.

And the question is: How do we understand those earthly joys? Because deep inside of us, we know that we want them! We know that we want those good things that give us real joy! And what we could do is spend all of our time chasing after those earthly, temporary joys, and trying to hold tightly to them when we have them. Because they're good!

But friends, they're not the end-goal.

This is an area where C.S. Lewis has been so helpful for me. Lewis, in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, talks about how he used to long for these really deep, existential moments of

intense joy. But what he realized, as he gradually was converted from atheism to Christianity, was that every moment of joy on this earth is merely a snapshot, a trickle, of the joy in Christ that you and I were made for. And the reason that all of those earthly joys eventually break down, disappoint, and die, is because they aren't the real source! They're merely imitations of it.

So, what does that mean? Should we reject all physical blessings and seek to live a life stripped bare of all earthly niceties? Should we all enter a monastery or try to live a stoic life in which we only spend time reading theology and serving the poor?

Lewis says no, those earthly joys still have a role to play. But it's not as an end goal to strive for, it's a signpost that points you to the end goal. This is what Lewis says at the end of his autobiography:

"I now know that the experience [of joy], considered as a state of my own mind, had never had the kind of importance I once gave it. It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer. While that other was in doubt, the pointer naturally loomed large in my thoughts. When we are lost in the woods the sight of a signpost is a great matter. He who first sees it cries, "Look!" The whole party gathers round and stares. But when we have found the road and are passing signposts every few miles, we shall not stop and stare. They will encourage us and we shall be grateful to the authority that set them up. But we shall not stop and stare, nor not much; not on this road, though their pillars are of silver and their lettering of gold."<sup>2</sup>

So, what Lewis is saying is that the joy of this world, the earthly joys that we experience, we cannot allow them to be the thing we stop and stare at, nor the thing that we put every ounce of energy into attaining. That's just turning good things into idols, things that ultimately draw us away from God and into traps, like quicksand, that suck us into things that will eventually break, disappoint, and leave us high and dry.

But that doesn't mean that they hold no value for us. Instead, the way we fight for joy in the midst of earthly joys is to allow them to point us to the end-goal, the joy in Christ that we are traveling toward. Eat the good food and the good drink to the glory of God, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, allow the blend of flavors and textures to point you to the creativity and overflowing goodness of God to provide for his people, that you will one day experience even more fully and forever. Enjoy the time with your family and reflect on the reality that God has invited you into his family, that one day you'll be in the best of company that you could have ever asked for, laughing until you cry, having deep and interesting conversations, and never worrying about whether someone's feelings will be hurt. Take a walk in the woods and be grateful for the God who has created beauty in this world, and look forward to the day when that beauty will not be marred by pollution nor by your subjective ability to appreciate it.

This is something we need practice at, because it is a mindset, a lens that we need to get used to seeing the world through. And it might seem forced at first. I have to be really intentional about this, setting aside time to reflect on the things I enjoy and ask: What do I enjoy about this?

---

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C.S., *Surprised by Joy* (1955, reprinted New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 204.

What does that tell me about God, and how is that reality about God going to be even better when I see him face to face one day?

**Some of you have had a bitter, hard Christmas season.**

It's not that you don't recognize the good things that the Christmas season brings for people, it's not that you're not grateful for the things God has blessed you with, but you're having a really hard time actually \*feeling\* the joy or the gratitude or the security.

Maybe you've recently had relationships sour, and you feel alone, either for the first Christmas, or the 10<sup>th</sup> Christmas, and the holidays dredge up feelings and bitterness that you can't escape. Maybe you recently lost loved ones to death, and the promises of God ring hollow in the midst of being surrounded by so much suffering in the world around you. Maybe you're just dissatisfied with a lot of life right now, work, family, finances, church—whatever it is, most days you find yourself filled with a lot more disappointment and frustration than you do joy.

For you, friends, I just have a couple thoughts:

First, the Lord knows that his people experience a tension between hearing his promises and actually experiencing them as being fulfilled. That's why prophecies like Isaiah 9 are in the Bible! That's why all the passages we've read for the last few weeks are there! The Israelites were either in ruins, war, internal conflict, or exile for nearly a thousand years. They were waiting in tension, for the Messiah who would save them, for that entire time! God knows and hears, and God is zealous to fulfill his promises one day, even if it seems like it is never going to happen. So, take heart in the fact that God has made these promises to us precisely for the times when it seems like we'll never be able to taste joy again. Our hope for real, lasting joy is not based on fleeting circumstances, but on the unchanging character of a God who is zealous for our eternal joy.

Second, Jesus knows your difficult, hard circumstances. In fact, it's because of Christmas that Jesus knows what it's like to face hard circumstances! The Son of God did not insert himself into this world as a victorious king, but as a crying infant. And just as Jesus went through infancy just like you, he went through teenage years just as you did, he worked a job like you did, he had a family like you did, he went through pain and suffering like you did, he was betrayed by people just as you were, he was tempted as you were. Jesus became a real human, which means he can sympathize with your weaknesses, Hebrews 4 says. He can sympathize with your circumstances, with all the things that make it difficult for you to tap into the joy of God. And yet, even now, Jesus is zealous for your joy! Romans 8:34 says that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, right now, interceding for you! He is going to war for your joy, right now.

So, talk to him about it! Don't be afraid to be honest with him about what you're feeling! He has the capacity to understand it, and the zeal to then intercede for you. It's precisely because Jesus came as an infant on Christmas, that we should run to him in prayer: He had a human life, with all its hurts, just as we did. And knowing our pain and suffering in that intimate pain makes his zeal for our joy so much more potent.



And not only is Jesus zealous for your joy, but the Holy Spirit is zealous for your joy! Romans 8:26 says this: **“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.**

Oh, friends, what comfort there is in knowing that when we desperately long for joy, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are working together to make it happen. But it's not going to happen by him handing us the right substances, the right job, the right temporary pleasures. It's going to happen by him giving us himself. Come to him in prayer and ask him to shape you into the kind of person that can taste his joy even in the worst of circumstances.

**Some of you are unfamiliar with the story of Jesus and how he could possibly bring this wonderful, perfect joy. It all seems a little too good to be true, a fairy tale.**

Friends, to you, I just have to say: If anything is too good to be true, it's the claims of the world, that \*things\* can ultimately fulfill your deep longing for happiness, that temporary experiences can fulfill that deep longing, that people can fulfill that longing. Things will all break down, experiences will come and go, and people will either fail you or die.

The claims of this world are far too good to be true. Those fleeting joys cannot fill the gaping longing within each of us.

But the promises of God endure forever. He has kept them before—which is what Christmas is a celebration of—and he will keep them again. He has invited you into his presence, where there are pleasures forevermore, through the work and power of Jesus. I would love to talk more with you about it.