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Good News of Great Joy
Luke 2:1-20

No matter how many times I hear this story,
there is always something different that ***stands out***.
What has caught my attention this year is the words of the ***angels***:
“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you ***good news of great JOY for all***
the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the
Messiah,^[a] the Lord.

Great Joy.

Now who doesn't want that at Christmas?

Aren't we ***all looking for JOY*** right now?
Don't we all want to feel happy, instead of stressed or sad?

And most of us look for joy in the ***expected places---***
As we ***decorate*** our homes.
Or spend ***time*** with family and friends
As we ***shop*** for just the right gift,
Or ***exchange*** special presents.

But how often do we ***find lasting joy*** in these places?
If you're like me, we see a ***glimpse of happiness***—but it's fleeting, right?
We feel great decorating the tree,
until we get to the ornament that reminds us of the loved one
who's not coming home.
We find just the right gift, or we receive something that blows us away,
but soon our hearts and minds move on to the next thing.
Can you remember every gift you've received last year? I can't.

And how ***long does the happiness*** of family and friends last?
About as long as it takes for them to argue or step on each other's toes, right?
None of us have a picture perfect family, or the perfect Christmas home,
or the perfect gifts, do we?

We are **real people, with real problems, and real pain**,
and we can **really see** that at Christmas!

So **where is the good news of great joy** that the angels announced?
Where's **that** joy?
What **IS** that joy?

Well, I can tell you this—it's **NOT the same** thing as **happiness**.
Happiness is a result of a **good circumstances**.
And often we can find some happiness—
In good moments at Christmas.

But happiness is not the same as the **joy** announced by angels.
Happiness is temporary, but **joy can last**.
Happiness is a good situation, but joy can come **despite a bad situation**.
Happiness is a product of what **WE do**.
But joy-- is something that **GOD does**.

In fact, the angels give us a **clue** about where joy comes from.
“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the
people: ¹¹ to you is **born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the
Messiah,**^[a] the Lord.

What is the good news of great joy?
It's the birth of a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.

So joy **comes from what GOD is bringing**,
not what we are **giving**,
not in the people around us,
or how we are **getting along** with one another.

In fact, this good news of great joy happens **regardless** of who we are, or what
we're doing at Christmas.
It's a joy that happens **in spite of** our circumstances.
In other words, things can be really bad,
and God can still bring us joy!
Now that's **incredible**, isn't it?

In fact, the ***whole story of Jesus' birth*** is about joy that happens
In the midst of ***difficult circumstances!***

Mary and Joseph didn't have a perfect Christmas.

She was ***pregnant*** before their wedding, a scandal to say the least.

Joseph chose to stay with her, a daring and surprising choice.

And Luke tells us that they had to ***travel*** far away, to Bethlehem,
when Mary was 9 months pregnant—

now, ask any mom how ridiculous that would be!

And to make matters worse, there was ***no room*** for them at the inn,
so they stayed with animals,

and she laid her newborn baby in a ***feeding trough, a manger.***

In the middle of this incredible mess---

came the ***joy of a newborn Savior!***

And shepherds were the first to hear and share this good news!

Shepherds.

Sounds reasonable to us, but shepherds

were simple, uneducated, unaccepted, dirty, rough and rowdy guys,

who were low on the social scale...

At the time of Jesus, ***shepherding was a profession*** usually filled by guys who
could not find respectable jobs.

They were ***stereotyped*** as liars, degenerates, and thieves.

Their ***testimony*** was not admissible in court,

and many towns had ***ordinances*** banning shepherds from the city limits.

The ***religious elite*** didn't like them, because they were usually working
instead of observing the Sabbath, and they were considered ritually unclean.

The ***Pharisees*** classified shepherds with tax collectors and prostitutes,
"sinners" by virtue of their vocation!

But it was ***to shepherds*** that God announced the good news of great joy!

They were the ***first to hear*** this good news,

And the first to announce it!

And they ***left their flocks*** to go see this great joy—

Because they witnessed angels singing of his birth!

Our world says that only the ***strong, wealthy and powerful are important,***

But God chooses people who are ***ordinary to experience the great joy!***

Like those shepherds minding their sheep.
Like us, no matter who we are, or where we're from.

And you know what's so awesome?
 The shepherds were **ordinary people doing ordinary work**,
 when God broke in with the good news of great joy!

Which means--
 God can break into **our ordinary lives**, with the good news of great joy!

The joy of Christmas
 It **doesn't have to be** around the table, or the tree, or with family and friends.
 It might just be when we are minding our own business.
 Soon we will be putting away the tree, and the decorations, and friends and
 family will leave,
 But the **good news of great joy will remain**.

Because no matter what's happening, **A Savior has been born for us!**
 And the manger today----is right here, in **our hearts**.

Today, Jesus is born **wherever people need Him**.
 It's not confined to a church, or a well-decorated home.
 Jesus is born wherever, whenever people really need Him.

The question is, do we **need Him**?
 How will we **welcome him and his joy, into our hearts**?

Christmas is wonderful, but difficult, isn't it?
 Talk of great joy can seem a bit removed from our real lives, right?
 There are empty seats at the table, relationships that are strained,
 There is the pain we carry--from caregiving, or illness, from job stress or loss,
 from the worry and fear of this pandemic,
 from sorrow over national and world events.
 Sometimes all the bright lights seem to **highlight the darkness** in our lives.

Where is this great joy, in the middle of our pain?
 John's Gospel says that Jesus is **THE LIGHT coming into the darkness**,
 and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Maybe that's why *light can help us*
to ***stop and remember the good news of great joy.***
Maybe the light on the tree, or a candle, or stars in the sky.
It could be any light.

We have some candles on our table, and it has helped me this year to take
time to light them, as I stop and remember—
That Jesus is the good news of great joy.
It doesn't matter what's happening, ***Jesus is here, helping us to get through***
whatever we face.
He is the light in the darkness.

Some years I sit quietly alone and looking at the lights on the tree to do this.
When I was a kid, we used to drive home from my grandmothers' house on
Christmas eve, and we could usually see stars late at night out the car window.

There's a reason that light is so meaningful in worship.
Jesus IS the light.

Light is a reminder that ***we are not alone, no matter how dark*** life can be.
Light is a reminder that ***joy can come to us***—even in the middle of pain.

The good news of ***great joy is for us--***
whoever we are,
wherever we are,
whatever we are doing.
It's ***not confined to certain*** times and places.
And certainly ***not confined to Christmas!***

The great joy comes from who Jesus is, and what he brings us.

Rev. Dwight Gunter says,

If our greatest need had been ***information***,

God would have sent us an ***educator***.

If our greatest need had been ***technology***, God would have sent us a ***scientist***.

If our greatest need had been ***money***, God would have sent us an ***economist***.

But since our greatest need was ***forgiveness***, God sent us a ***Savior***...

This is the ***good news that brings great joy.***

["Joy."](#) Dr. Dwight Gunter, *Preacher's Magazine*, 2007.

God sent us Jesus, a Savior, the one who can bring us hope, and grace.

That is a *joy that lasts*,
Because Jesus *keeps on giving* us His love, and hope, and grace!
For all eternity!

And that joy--is *better* than happiness,
Because there's *no end* to that good news!

So how about this Christmas, we *let go of all the hyped-up expectations*,
and just *let God be in our hearts*?
How about we stop, and *take a quiet moment alone*,
Find a light somewhere,
and let that light speak to your heart.

And as you look at the light, think of the good news
Many of us have it memorized already—it's what the angels sang:
*"Do not be afraid; for see—
I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹
to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord.*

That's the message that can bring us joy--
No matter where we are, or what we are doing--
No matter how *alone* we might be or how *low* we might feel.

Because it's a *joy that transcends* nativity scenes and Christmas trees,
and all the gifts.
It *goes well beyond* this candlelight service,
and the gathering of friends and family.
It's a joy that *sustains our hearts and lives*.

It is the *Good News of the Gospel--now, and always*.
So may we stop and remember, and let it sink in.
Because this joy is for you, and me.

*“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you **good news of great joy** for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord.*

And all God’s people said, Amen.