

## Good News of Great Joy

Luke 2:8-14

*“Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king! Let every heart prepare Him room and let heaven and nature sing!”*

**I LOVE that song—WE ALL love it.**

- I love hearing that song while shopping at Lowes as the gospel is sung & everyone hums along...

**The Christmas holiday is an interesting contradiction:**

- It is the MOST Christ-centered holiday—the word “CHRIST” is in the name!

**But our culture’s celebration of Christmas doesn’t celebrate Jesus—we celebrate US!**

- WE write out wish-lists and teach our kids to mail them to a fictional N.P. resident.
- We stare at beautifully lit trees and listen to Las Vegas performers sing Christmas songs...
- And as Christians we do remember Jesus and work hard to keep Him at the center of it all.

*But it might do us some good to STOP and REMEMBER and SIT WITH the reality of Christmas for a moment.*

- To try and experience the incredible JOY of that first Christmas in Bethlehem.
- To feel the ANTICIPATION and remember the deep NEED for Jesus here on earth.
- To allow our hearts to well up with joy and gratitude for God’s incredible gift to us in Jesus.

**That is what Advent is—we intentionally posture ourselves with anticipation for Jesus’ arrival.**

- We will take the next 2 weeks to “Let every heart prepare Him room”
- To REMEMBER our desperate need for a savior
- To REJOICE in Jesus.
- **Today we celebrate ADVENT as a way to prepare our hearts for the JOY of Jesus.**

**Today: “Good News of Great Joy!”**

**Luke 2:8-14 (NASB)**

In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock at night. **9** And an angel of the Lord *suddenly* stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. **10** And so the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people; **11** for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army *of angels* praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased.”

**\*\*PRAYER\*\***

**In many ways, Christmas appeals to the worst in us...**

- It has largely become a season of unrestrained consumerism like no other season of the year.
- It is also a season of unrestrained emotions:
  - happy people are happier but also sad people become more sad.
  - Loneliness feels more pronounced at Christmas...
  - Those of us who mourn tend to feel it more sharply...

**So Christmas can make an already hard season seem bleak... and bleak seasons seem even darker...**

**And this has been a HARD year, hasn’t it??**

- Depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts have all increased among our youth and young adults.
- Marital strain and separation is rampant.
- Financial hardship and even financial devastation is becoming more common...

## Let's face it, we live in **HARD TIMES!**

Regardless of where you stand on political and social issues, this pandemic has made life **HARD!**

- I've lost more than 1 relative to COVID—my dear mother quarantines in both isolation AND mourning...
- My brother has just been forced to shut down his small business—his family's livelihood—**AGAIN.**
- I have several friends who have lost **great** jobs and are now working low-wage jobs to get by.
- We probably all know people sincerely struggling with frustration, depression and anger.
  - Kid's in my neighborhood and in our youth group are struggling to stay sane.
  - **PARENTS** are struggling to stay sane!!

Things are **HARD—BLEAK...**

For some of us, this Christmas may be the hardest, most bleak season of this **HARD** year.

- **IRONICALLY, Christmas was meant to rescue us from the low places of despair and hopelessness.**

## It **SURE** seems that people are **READY** to be rescued from **THIS** year!

- At the root of Christmas is the recognition that we need a savior...
  - Christmas even **highlights** our need for a savior...
  - **AND the good news of great JOY is that Christmas is all about God meeting this need!**

## At some level, everyone is aware of Jesus—especially at this time of year...

- **EVERYONE** knows its **Christ**-mas time right now...
- **EVERYONE** has seen Charlie Brown's Christmas...
- We all live by a **CALENDAR** that was **LITERALLY** reset on Jesus' birth.
- **EVERYONE** on earth is affected by this.

This universal awareness of Jesus' arrival serves as a reminder of the universal **NEED** for Jesus.

## **Jesus is GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY for 2 reasons: Jesus SAVES US and Gives us JOY!!**

1. **We need a savior.** (good news is Jesus can save us!)
2. **We need JOY.** (good news is Jesus gives us Joy!)

### 1. We need a **SAVIOR—EVERYONE—and not only because life is so hard right now...**

Our predicament is not **JUST** due to external forces like a **PANDEMIC** and **GOVT RESTRICTIONS...**

- **We need a Savior because of sin—we ALL sin and harbor rebellion in our heart against God.**
  - Because of our sin and rebellion, we suffer guilt and separation from God...
- **We need a Savior because of the BROKENNESS that sin and rebellion has left in it's wake.**
  - *We need restoration to GOD and restoration to one another!*
  - ***This is a tough spot—this is a BLEAK SPOT!!***
  - *\*merry Christmas!\**

### We. need. to be. **RESCUED—SAVED.**

- **Our sin is DESTRUCTIVE and MESSY.**
  - We make messes of our life that we cannot always undo
    - Broken relationships.
    - Broken trust
    - Broken homes
    - Abuse of all sorts...

These things are all products of sin—sin is messy & destructive & hurtful.

**Listen, Jesus' birth is GOOD NEWS for those who recognize their need for a savior.**

- We need Saving from our rebelliousness— sin...
- Rescue from brokenness.
- Relieved of our shame.
- Delivered from discouragement.

**Not only do we need to be saved from the GUILT of sin, but also the brokenness and messiness that sin leaves in its wake.**

- Jesus **IS** our rescuer—He has come to **SAVE** us from sin and brokenness.
- It is for this reason that Jesus' birth is good news of great joy.

## **The Christmas story tells us that Jesus was BORN to save!!**

His birth is an amazing story—**Jesus was born into HARD TIMES—harder than our times!**

### **The cultural and practical circumstances of his birth seem IMPOSSIBLY bleak.**

- First, Jesus was not born in his parent's hometown of Nazareth because they were forced by the government to travel to Bethlehem for a census.
- His parents were very poor, very young, and very UNMARRIED when Jesus was conceived, and society had no place for such a scandalous situation!
- In fact, Jesus is born in an animal stable after failing to find a proper room in an inn.
  - Surrounded by shepherds & their flocks of livestock...
- The King of Kings is born a helpless baby in a dirty barn to young, poor parents surrounded by dirty people FAR from the comforts of home—all because the government had limited people's freedoms and imposed strict requirements on people.

### **The hard times didn't stop at Jesus' birth!**

- The governor started hunting down male babies and killing them so as a child he was Jesus was forced to flee the country.
- As an adult cynical and arrogant authorities would look down on Him.
- Prideful religious leaders were disgusted with him.

***Jesus is born to lowly people in lowly circumstance and lives life surrounded by lowly people in HARD, BLEAK times...***

### **WHY??**

**\*\*Because only low and broken people KNOW that they need a savior.**

### **God sent His son to DARK places in DARK times to save BROKEN people.**

- Sounds like 2020, doesn't it?!?
- Jesus came to save THEN—THERE, and is able to save HERE—NOW!!
- On the very FRINGE of society, the love of God became FLESH!
  - The WORD of God became HISTORY!!
  - The LOVE OF GOD became a man!!

**This is good news because it's starting to feel a little hopeless in our time, isn't it?**

### **The arrival of Jesus was GOOD NEWS for SHEPHERDS on the hills above Bethlehem.**

- The Lord had brought His kingdom to earth.
- The Lord had brought the promise of PEACE to earth.
- The Lord had sent a savior for ALL mankind.

### **God's kingdom had come to EARTH!**

- This kingdom was not birthed or brought by any human plan or power.
- This kingdom did not arrive due to any human intervention or intention or good will.

**\*\*God brought His kingdom to earth out of love—in the form of a baby: JESUS.**

### **This reign of God is amazing & mysterious...**

- To worldly wisdom it seems like foolishness.
- God HIMSELF has come, and He came as a babe...born to poor helpless young people
- Born into a bleak, broken culture in order to save lost, hurting people.
- THIS was good news then and it is good news NOW!!

**Jesus's arrival is GOOD NEWS because Jesus came to SAVE US—and we need a savior. (good news!) But Jesus is more than good news, His arrival is "Good news of GREAT JOY!!**

### **2. We need JOY.**

- The good news of great joy is that Jesus IS our Joy!

- Not only was Jesus born as a helpless baby in order to save helpless people, but Jesus **ADOPTS helpless people into God's Kingdom Family!!**
- **YOU are IMPORTANT to God!**
- **YOU are important to God's His Kingdom!**
  - We are both an object of God's love AND invited to be AGENTS of God's love as well.

**Here, in the book of Luke we see GOD inviting HUMANS into His kingdom on earth.**

- Jesus' birth is GOOD NEWS that brings GREAT JOY to HELPLESS PEOPLE!
- **Jesus doesn't just save us from our OLD LIFE—which is awesome enough!!**
- **He brings us into a NEW LIFE—WITH HIM!**

**THIS is good news of GREAT JOY!!**

**The world could really use some great JOY right now...**

- So much BROKENNESS, DISAPPOINTMENT and SADNESS and BAD NEWS...
- The world is crazy—life is crazy!
- It is impossible to find TRUE and LASTING joy on our own.

**We really need some GOOD NEWS and GREAT JOY, don't we??**

**We TRY on our own to create joy in life...**

- STUFF—cars, houses, gadgets, vacations...
- LOVE—relationships, physical gratification, friendships
- REPUTATION—social stature, position, image

**None of these things can ever give us lasting joy.**

**None of these things will ever satisfy us.**

Only JESUS is able to provide purpose and satisfaction and JOY.

- In fact, Jesus PROMISED **HIS joy** to us!

**John 17:13 (NLT)**

**I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy.**

**John 15:9,11 (NASB)**

**Just as the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; remain in My love.**

**These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.**

**So not only does God SAVE US through Jesus, but He gives us FULL JOY in Jesus!**

- THAT'S the joy we have in Jesus—we are FILLED with God's Joy.
- No longer having to strive for joy!

But there is something specific about this joy.

- This joy is not JUST the result of something good happening to us.
  - YES, God's good news of salvation does bring us joy!

**But there is MUCH MORE to it—our joy is actually in knowing and living life WITH God!**

The Psalmist testifies to this:

**Psalm 16:11 (NLT)**

**You show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.**

Notice that this joy comes from the PRESENCE of God— ***"the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever."***

- Jesus isn't like a mechanic who fixes us like a broken car and sends us on our way.
- He CONTINUES to work in us and bless us with His presence.

**This is God's promise from the very beginning:**

### **Deuteronomy 31:6 (NASB)**

**Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid, for the Lord your God is the One who is going with you. He will not desert you or abandon you."**

God promises to not leave us or abandon His people— THAT is God's promise.

**We were created by God, in the image of God—HE made us LIKE HIM.**

- God knows what we need
- We were created to be like God and we were created to live life WITH God!
- ...but SIN & brokenness messes that up-DIRTY MIRROR—we lose sight of God's plan for us...
- **So we don't look within to see who we were made to be, we look to God to see what we are supposed to be like.**

**\*\*When we look to God we see first that God is LOVE—we were made for love**

- To know and receive and be filled to overflowing with God's love...
- To OVERFLOW this love to others!

**\*\*When we look at God we also see that God is community—we were made for community.**

- As God exists in 3 persons, so too were we made to live life TOGETHER!
- We live WITH God and WITH one another.

**\*\*When we look to God we also see that God is HOLY (set apart, different, pure)**

- God is set apart from the ordinary, and we were created to be set apart.
- Jesus deals with our sin and enables us to be WITH God...
- Jesus gives us NEW LIFE—we can now live life FOR God—this gives us PURPOSE!

THIS was God's plan from the very beginning: **God created humanity to be WITH Him.**

**Jesus knows what you were made for—He knows what brings true Joy!!**

- He knows how far each of us has fallen away from God's perfect plan for us...
- He ALSO knows how hard and hurtful and lonely life can be...

**Jesus can relate to hard times and bleak seasons because He has BEEN THERE.**

- **He knows hardship...**

### **Isaiah 53:3**

**He (JESUS) was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.**

- Jesus is FAMILIAR with wherever you are today...

**He KNOWS your struggles—He knows your grief.**

- He is familiar with financial hardship.
- He is familiar with loss of personal freedoms
- He knows what it's like to feel oppressed!
- Jesus knows what it's like to be abandoned by a loved one.

- He is familiar with loneliness and isolation.
- Jesus experienced false accusations and betrayal by His closest friends...

**Listen, Jesus was born into a LOW PLACE & wants to meet you in YOUR low places.**  
And He meets us—low people, in LOW places, and He brings salvation—JOY!!

**Life separated from God can be CRAZY and OVERWHELMING and just too much...**

- Separated from the peace of God...
- Separated from the APPROVAL and COMPANIONSHIP we have in relationship with God.
- Separated from the PURPOSES of a life lived with God.

**Apart from God we live peace-less lives—JOY-less lives.**

- Hopelessly enslaved to sin.
- Helpless victims of our own brokenness and that of others around us.
  - WE NEED A SAVIOR!
  - WE NEED JOY!

**And God has a plan to rescue the hopeless—a savior to save the helpless...**

- This plan was hatched on that first CHRISTMAS more than 2,000 years ago.
- **For unto us—unto YOU a savior was born!!**
  - Jesus was born FOR YOU!!
    - **This may be the first Christmas you HEAR this... PLEASE HEAR THIS**

It brings God great joy to send His son to rescue and save you!

- He sent Jesus into DARK TIMES to save you in YOUR dark time.

**Jesus came to save the lost, broken hopeless and helpless,**

We know this because He appeared to SHEPHERDS first!!—OUTCASTS.

- Working at night, Outskirts of town, Outskirts of society
- Dirty—physically and spiritually...
- Jesus wasn't put off by their state or their status—He came to SAVE them!

**And at first the shepherds were AFRAID—What were THEY doing with an angel**

- **Imagine how these filthy shepherds felt in the presence of ANGELS?!?**
- When confronted with GLORY all they would be able to see is their own MESS...
- Isn't that how we are—evaluating ourselves by how well we measure up & perform.
- We look at ourselves & look at others & all we see are the ways we fall short...

**We feel this way because it is true—on our own we DO fall short...**

Romans 3:23 tells us that we "... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"

- We KNOW where we stand on our own—we fall short.

**But God doesn't leave us to stand on our own—that's the Christmas story!!**

**John 3:16-17 (NASB)—“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.**

**THAT is the Christmas news of great joy!! THAT is love!!**

- This love is SHOCKING—because we don't deserve it!
- This love is hard to understand—what could POSSIBLY be in it for God??

And so that evening in the hills outside of Bethlehem the shepherds are confused—scared—afraid...

**And the Angel says, “Don't fear! God isn't judging you for your sins, He is RESCUING YOU from them!!”**

- This is good news!
- This is God's GREAT JOY!

**The GOOD NEWS is that this joy doesn't just remain in God—The Angel says that it is for US—ALL of us!**

- The message isn't simply that Jesus was born, but **"to YOU He is born."**
- The angel didn't say I bring good news, but "I bring YOU good news that will bring great joy"...**YOU have a savior!**

**This is the Christmas gift from God to you—God loves you!**

- In fact, He loves you so much that He sent a SAVIOR to RESCUE you and bring you JOY!

**You may feel low, worthless, unseen, discouraged, STUCK... TEENAGERS, LISTEN!**

**There is GOOD NEWS and GREAT JOY for you!! YOU have a savior!**

- God sent Jesus into a BLEAK, BROKEN world to rescue HURTING people.
- Jesus was born into a DARK place in DARK times to save HURTING people and bring them JOY.

**That's what Jesus does—THAT is the good news of great joy for YOU today!**

- God is not afraid of your mess!
- God is not too busy to rescue you from your situation.

**Today God has a Christmas gift for you—and it is a TREASURE!!**

Jesus' birth is GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY for YOU today!

**Receive God's gift of JOY!**

- HEAR and RESPOND to this good news of great joy.
- Today God offers a gift of love and salvation and forgiveness for ALL PEOPLE.

*"Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king! Let every heart prepare Him room and let heaven and nature sing!"*