

Victory of the Lamb – December 18, 2022 – Christmas List – Joy –

Luke 2:10,11 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Asking for a friend: Have you ever struggled to find the right size box for a gift? And so sometimes maybe the box doesn't quite close all the way? Or you have to fill the box with tissue paper, bubble wrap or some other filler so that your breakable gift doesn't get destroyed by the obligatory box shake? Or if you are looking for a gift bag have you ever found a bag that drowns your gifts or one that ends up splitting down the side because the gift you have is just a little too big? Or try to find a nice gift card holder that doesn't cost more than the gift card?

Today we are so close, we are so close to Christmas, and the gift we want to open today is a gift that we all want. JOY. We see the word JOY all over the place this time of year. Joy is found written on ornaments, Christmas cards, yard signs, manger scenes, painted in windows, we sing about it, we sing with it, and sometimes we just yearn for it with all of our heart. Luke 2:10,11 **But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.**

I was at a Christmas Concert this past weekend and Matt Maher **This is the most _____ time of year.** What did you put in the blank? Matt said and sang it this way, **This is the most DYSFUNCTIONAL time of year.** In other words, we don't always have joy. Let's look at some joy robbers not only at Christmas time but throughout the whole year and the antidote to a joyless life.

Word scramble **X E A N Y I T** Sorry if that caused you **ANXIETY**. Anybody suffering from anxiety like Mary did? Scholars disagree about the exact age of Mary but they all agree that she was young, very young. Let's just say she was 14 years old. That means when she was 13 an angel appeared to her. You can bet that elevated her heartbeat. And to think our staff jumps when I sneak up behind them and say "hi" really fast. (Oh, maybe that is understandable after all. Just kidding. But seriously,) if an angel appeared to you, I think like me that is a time when you are going to be afraid. But after the angel calmed her, he shocked her with this amazing news that she was going to conceive and give birth to the Son of the Most High. Mary is like, I don't know a lot, but I know this isn't the way it works.

The angel tells her the Spirit of God is going to overshadow her. And Mary received that message in faith.

But she still has to tell her parents, to tell Joseph a most unbelievable story. Think, as a 14-year-old, she was shaking in her sandals, especially when death was an acceptable punishment for sex outside of marriage. How many nights do you think she tossed and turned thinking about how to bring up this subject? Who do you think she most anxious to tell? Her parents? Or Joseph?

She made it through all of that. But then came this decree from Caesar that everyone had to go to their own hometown to register. So, there is Mary on her way from Nazareth to Bethlehem, away from her parents, with a man she barely knew, and the baby due any day now. No stress there right. And you thought making rosettes was stressful.

Well, most of you know they get to the one-horse town of Bethlehem, but it is bursting a seems because everybody had to come back to register. There was no Bethlehem General Hospital, there was no hotel room, there was no bread and breakfast, there was Air BNB, but there was a cave, a barn, likely with hay and all sorts of other _____. Perfect place for a 14-year-old away from home to give birth without a doctor or midwife. Anxiety, stress, fear – joy robbers.

Well, how about you? Do you have any anxiety, stress, or fear at this time of year? Maybe your to do list is longer than the hours in the day, or maybe looks a little something like this: **picture on screen** (make grocery list, pick up dry cleaning, wrap presents, check the gift delivery status, order groceries, basketball practice at 3:45, dance at 6, wash uniforms, pick up supper, buy teacher gift, check arrival time of family, assemble the toys, finish the report, go to the butcher shoppe to pick out the meat, prepare for budget meeting, fix the lights on the house, try not to say the wrong thing, car into repair shop, replace the furnace filter. Easy as eating a Christmas cookie.

What are you anxious about this Christmas? What is making you uptight, nervous, and afraid? Maybe it's your finances, your health or a loved one's health, maybe you are wondering if you are going to ever get married, or if your marriage stands a chance, maybe it's concern over a job, a move, what is going to happen in the new year.

The antidote to anxiety, stress, and fear is found in the mouth of that 14-year-old Mary who said, **“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”** Let me translate that for you. You go straight to God and you tell God the truth. You tell him, “God, I can’t handle all of this. In fact, I can’t handle any of this. And by trying to handle all of this and the expectation I have of myself and the expectations of others has me in a knot. You take this. You take it all. God you are bigger than all of this. You are bigger than everything.” You know when you **take the I out of anxiety**, there is nothing left, the pressure is off. And joy is on!

But I know for some of you there is something else robbing your joy. And so, we are going to turn to Joseph.

Matthew 1:18 His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ **Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^[e] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.** The custom of the day was that the husband to be would build onto his father’s house and when he would get the house ready, he would go and get his bride to be, and they would get married and move into the edition. So, while Mary is off visiting her relative Elizabeth, Joseph is making bricks, pitching the roof, smoothing out the walls, building a table, and Mary comes back six months later. But Mary is not as slender as she was when she left. And now we have the other side of the conversation between Mary and Joseph. And there is Mary, shaking. Not sure she had to say anything. It was apparently obvious what she had been up to.

Joseph shakes too. Joseph’s heart drops. The betrayal, the disappointment, the broken heart, the anger, the hurt, the embarrassment of having built an edition on the house which everybody saw, for a woman who apparently wants to be with someone else. Not a whole lot of joy in that, in fact not even a gram of joy. But plenty of resentment and grief.

It was Joseph’s turn for sleepless nights.

There is a lot of hurt in the world. It is one of those sin things. Are you hurting? Maybe you have been abused physically, emotionally, sexually. Maybe you have experienced racism, classism, misogyny. You have been overlooked, mistreated, rejected? Who has hurt you? Who has hurt you more than anyone else? Are you

still holding on to that hurt? Ready for a hard truth, but I do share it with empathy – resentment will not make you feel better, bitterness will not change the past.

How do we go from hurt to joy?

This is what Joseph did. Matthew 1:19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^[e] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. Joseph was not going to treat Mary with vengeance, he wasn't going to give her what the law required, he gave her grace. He made up his mind to divorce her quietly. He was not going to make a public spectacle of her. He was going to let it go and give her grace. And after he came to that conclusion this is what happened. ²⁰ **But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[f] because he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"^[g] (which means "God with us"). ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.**

You know what grace enable Joseph to do? It enabled him to be the stepfather to God's Son. What a blessing! What joy!

So, what do you think? What do you think about letting go of that hurt? I know that for virtually all of us will come that day when we are hurt so bad and we will have it in our gut to hold on to that hurt. To say, "I'm not strong enough to let go." You know what, me either. But God provides it. Nehemiah 8:10 **the joy of the LORD is your strength.**" God is going to take care of it. So you can let it go, and you know what will be left – joy!

Jesus came to bring us joy. That is what the angel said, Luke 2:10,11 **the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.**

When your happiness, satisfaction, pleasure is found in temporal circumstantial, and fragile things like money, health, a person, a family, a job, a lifestyle you are

setting yourself up for anxiety and hurt. But when your joy is rooted in things that never change, when your joy is rooted in eternal truths, it outshines every circumstance of life. Because regardless of what the person said, did, or what the test results read, or the balance on your back statement, there is joy in Jesus.

So here is the key if you want to open the gift of joy. Take your focus off you, your anxiety, your hurt, your bitterness, whatever and place your focus on Jesus, your Savior.

To be clear, you won't find joy under the tree but on the tree. Because Jesus who we say is the reason for the season says, "no you are the reason for the season. You are the reason I came." I came to restore you to the joy of being in the presence of God. **Hebrews 12:2 For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Focus on Jesus. **Because we find joy in the presence of God.** Because no matter what happens Jesus is still King, still King over anxiety, still King over resentment, your sins are still forgiven, and your salvation is still complete. Romans 15:13 **May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**