

Christmas Joy

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Date: 24 December 2023

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[0 : 0 0] you today. A special welcome if you are new or visiting. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word. We are in the season of Advent, and the word Advent comes from a Latin word that means to come or to arrive. And so during this season, we celebrate Jesus coming or arriving to this earth. And in doing that, we do a couple things. We celebrate what's happened in the past. So we sing songs like, joy to the world, the Lord has come. And we also celebrate and long and look forward to the future, Jesus' second coming.

And so we sing songs like, O come, O come, Emmanuel. And really what we do during Advent is the entire Christian life, which is that we look to God's actions in the past. We hope for his actions in the future. And both of those allow us to live with faith and obedience in the present. And we're taking a break from our series in the book of Judges this morning. Since it is Christmas Eve, we're going to be in Luke chapter 1, looking at what is called the Magnificat, which is Mary's song, praising God for what he's done in choosing her as the mother of our Savior. Now, it is a cliché at this time of year to talk about in the church the true or real meaning of Christmas, right? But what about the real or true joy of Christmas? Mary doesn't hide it. She tells us right up front, if you look at our passage, she says, verses 46 and 47, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. So Mary's experiencing tremendous joy in this moment. Now, the question for us is not just what's the source of her joy, but what's the source of our joy as well. Mary's filled with joy. How on Christmas do we have real and true joy? Let's say with that that we turn together to God's Word. We're in Luke chapter 1, starting at verse 46. You can turn with me in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word, and we're told in Proverbs chapter 30 that every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him, which is why we read now Luke chapter 1, starting at verse 46. And Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. Verse 50. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you as we do every week for speaking to us in your word. We thank you that you are a good father, the ultimate father, who tells his children exactly what they need to know. And we ask that you would do that this morning, that you would help us, that we would know exactly what you have for us in this passage, and that you would remind us of the true and ultimate source of our joy, and that would overflow into our celebrations together today and tomorrow. And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[4 : 41] Well, Mary doesn't bury the lead for us. She doesn't hide the headline. She tells us right here at the very beginning of the passage what it is that she's experiencing. Verses 46 and 47, her soul magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior. Now, this distinction of soul and spirit is simply a way of saying that Mary's whole self is caught up in what's happening. She is having a full-bodied experience. She's being filled with this joy. Some compare this to when Ella Fitzgerald sings, I'm all for you, body and soul. It's all of Mary that's rejoicing. She is filled and overflowing with what is happening. And we're told also not just that this is happening to her. We're told why.

Mary doesn't waste time getting to the point, but instead she gives us the reasons for her joy, why it is that she is experiencing this. First, we have some narrow reasons, reasons that are for Mary personally. None of us are the mother of Jesus. And so what she gives us here are things that are for her specifically. Verse 48, he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. Verse 49, for he who is mighty has done great things for me. And so there's a sense in which Mary's joy has a focus on what God has done for her specifically. However, she moves from the narrow very quickly to the broad. Verse 50, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

In other words, Mary is reminding us that her joy is not just for her. Mary's joy is for everyone who fears God.

Mary's joy doesn't remain something that's just for her. No, her joy is something that pours out and overflows to the rest of God's people. God has done great things for you. If you fear him.

This is on page seven of your worship guide. I would argue that despite the unique features of Mary's situation, we should all be amazed that we are Christians, that the great God is working in us. We should be just as shocked that God would give us, with all our smallness and flaws, such a mighty gift.

[7 : 42] Yes, Mary experiences honor that is unique to her. And salvation is so much greater.

What you have received in Christ is better than Mary being the mother of Jesus. Christian, God has done great things for you. And so where's the joy? How do we experience the joy that Mary experiences? Well, she gives us a hint here in verse 48. It requires a humble estate.

Mary is blown away that God has looked on her. The point is this. It is easy for the gospel to bring great joy when we know our need. It is easy for the gospel to bring us great joy when we know how dependent we are. Which brings you greater joy? Someone who forgives you a debt of \$10 or someone who forgives you a debt of \$100,000? Which brings you more joy? Someone who forgives you a debt of \$100,000 or someone who forgives you a debt of \$1,000,000? The more humble your estate, the greater your joy. The more you understand and know your need for the gospel, the more you will be like Mary here.

We give gifts to each other at Christmas as a small symbol of the gift that God has given us in Christ.

How large of a gift do you think you've received? The larger the gift, the larger the joy. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

[10:14] The joy that we find in this passage, though, is more than just personal salvation. Mary also reminds us there is going to be this reordering of the world. Now, that's what we see in verses 51 through 53. In verse 51, we find out that God has shown strength with his arm. God has great strength. In fact, it's so great, it is greater than anyone else's strength. Now, there's all sorts of things that God could do with his mighty arm. What does he choose to do?

Well, these next couple of verses, we find out God is going to stage a takedown. And he's going to stage a takedown of the proud, the mighty, and the rich. There is going to be a great inversion.

Jesus is coming to bring a great reversal. And this reversal is going to happen for two categories. We see the world broken up into two separate groups. We have the proud and the humble.

And it's very simple here. The proud are lifted up. I mean, the proud are brought low, the humble are lifted up. Not hard to understand. One group is going down, one group is going up. I will look first at the proud. Who exactly is in this group? How do you know that you are one of the people who is going to be brought down in this great reversal? Well, thankfully, verses 50 and 51 are right next to each other. And so they give us this contrast. We understand the scattering of the proud, verse 51, because we're given the opposite category in verse 50. Who is the mercy for? The mercy is for those who fear God. That's verse 50. So who are the proud? Verse 51. Clearly, they are those who do not fear God. Those are our two categories here. And so the proud, we're given a picture of them. We're given a picture of what it looks like not to fear God. The proud are not confident in God. They are confident in themselves. And there's a few things in particular that they have great confidence in.

The proud are confident in their power. That's verse 52. The proud are confident in their wealth. It's verse 53. The proud have so much power and so much wealth that they have no need for God.

[12:55] I've told you before that wealth and power, they're not bad. They're not wrong. In fact, we need people who are wealthy and powerful. They're just extremely dangerous. And they're extremely dangerous because wealth and power present this temptation to believe that we are somehow self-sufficient and independent. It is the wealthy and the powerful who face a special temptation to believe they do not need God. It is wealth and power that fool us, that trick us into thinking we don't have a humble estate. I've told you also before, it is hard to be in this part of town. It is hard to reach the Broadmoor because many people there have too much money to need God. It is easy to hide spiritual need when you have no physical needs. It is hard to hide spiritual need when you have many physical needs.

The greater the wealth, the greater the power, the less a sense of need. Now, it's easy to pick on the Broadmoor. The reality is this. All of us in this room are extremely wealthy and extremely powerful.

If we look around the world and throughout time, we are the richest and most powerful people who have ever lived. The point is not that you cannot be rich or powerful. The point is this. We must know our need.

We must be people who know our humble estate. The greater the need, the greater the joy.

The proud are going to be cast down and the humble will be lifted up. We turn to the humble next. We see them twice. We're told about them in verse 48 and verse 52. In the humble, we've already seen know their need for God. They're looking to him for salvation.

[15:14] And if you know your need for God and you are looking to him for salvation, then Christmas brings joy.

Not just regular joy, capital J joy. The ultimate joy because it's the ultimate gift. And so the same question comes up for us here. Do you know your need?

The greater you know it, the greater the joy. The greater the gift, the larger the celebration. There is joy, not just because of God's mercy to the humble. There's also joy in this great reversal.

Why is this great reversal such good news? Why is it worth celebrating that the proud are going to be cast down and the humble are going to be lifted up? Well, I'm going to suggest for you two reasons that this is worth celebrating. First, if the humble are going to be lifted up and the proud are going to be cast down, there is an unshakable hope. And the unshakable hope looks like this. The world tells you what is most valuable in this life may never happen to you. You may never have the peak experiences that make life worth living. You may never have the romantic connection, which is the pinnacle of human existence. You may never amass enough wealth for it to be worth it. And so unless you're in a very elite group, your options are set, your marriage is whatever it's going to be. Your education is capped where it's going to be capped. Your ability to experience things that are the good life in this world, they may or may not be available. In other words, you at some level are stuck. You don't have the power and the wealth.

[17 : 38] Good luck. The gospel here says something very different. What is most valuable and precious in this life is attainable to all. What is most valuable and precious in this life comes through faith and repentance? Maybe in the eyes of the world, your options are set. Maybe in the eyes of the world, your ceiling is fixed. The eyes of the gospel tell us something very different. One of the most precious promises we have in scripture comes in 1 Peter 1, verse 4, which tells us that we have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. In other words, the casting down of the proud and the raising up of the humble reminds us that the best is yet to come. You have not missed out on anything. Verse 53, he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty.

Are you in the humble? Do you fear God? He will fill you with good things. Better things than you've ever experienced. Greater things than you can imagine. The great reversal is good news because you, Christian, have that inheritance. An inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

The great reversal is also good news because it reminds us that evil is coming to an end.

Think of an evil person. Either God is going to turn their heart from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, or one day they will meet full and final justice.

Verse 51, he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. The great reversal is good news because one day there will be no more human trafficking.

[20 : 26] There will be no more corrupt politicians. There will be no more leaders who care more for themselves than they do for their followers.

He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. I invite you to look with me on the very back of your worship guide, which has a quote that I think is worth time and meditation about the great reversal.

The world as God sees it is a panorama of deprivation and exploitation and death. The history of the world has shown over and over again that it is incapable of rescuing itself from forces too strong for mere human nature.

The great good news of the last judgment is that on that day, God will set everything right once and for all. He will end war forever.

And then now it's quoted from Mary's song. He will put down the mighty from their seat and exalt the humble and meek. He will overthrow the pride of the smug and arrogant.

[21 : 48] That, brothers and sisters, is Christmas joy. God is coming. Jesus has come to set all things right.

That's also what's counterintuitive about the gospel. The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1 that God has chosen what is weak and foolish to shame the wisdom of the world.

And what is it that we celebrate that's weak and foolish? Well, we celebrate one element of that is that God came as a little baby. That it is the child in the manger who is going to overthrow the mighty and cast down the proud.

And it's the child in the manger who is going to lift up the humble and fill the hungry with good things. So where does our Christmas joy come from?

It comes from the knowledge that God saves us from our sin. That we have the greatest gift that leads to the greatest joy. It comes from the knowledge that he is going to lift up the humble.

[23 : 03] That the best things in this world are yet to come. And you're not going to miss them. And it comes from the news that he is going to cast down the wicked.

He's going to bring full and final justice once and for all. And that is exactly what we sing together in this final verse of the reign of mercy. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that you give us a great hope. Not just a great hope, but the greatest hope. We ask that you would remind us of what is most true.

We celebrate your first coming. And you would help us to look with great longing towards your second. We thank you that we don't have to worry about whether we've earned or deserved these things.

We know that we haven't. And so we simply ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[24 : 26] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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