The Gift of Joy

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In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 *to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.* 28 *And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."* 29 *But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.* 30 *The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* 31 *And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.* 32 *He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.* 33 *He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."* 34 *Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"* 35 *The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.* 36 *And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.* 37 *For nothing will be impossible with God."* 38 *Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.* (Luke 1:26-38).

1. Joy of the Conception of a Baby

There are many things that give us joy in the world. For me, one of the greatest joys was the birth of our children and when we learned about our soon to be grandson.

Having a baby is a joyful time. However, for some, a child can also be a time of concern. In 2017 in the US, over 194,000 children were born to teenage parents. I am sure that these parents may have been happy, but also concerned about raising children at such a young age.

2. The Birth of Jesus

Can you imagine what was going through Mary's head when she met the angel Gabriel and learned she would have a baby? Luke 1:29 says in the NIV version, "***Mary was greatly troubled at his words***." When the angel said that Mary was the "favored one" and would bear a son, Mary was deeply troubled.

According to Luke 1:27, Mary was a young woman in Nazareth, a town of Galilee. She was a young teenage girl engaged to Joseph, a young man living in the town. In about a year, the two would be married. The

reason Mary was terrified when she met the angel Gabriel is because she knew what happened to women who became pregnant before they were married. According to Jewish tradition, if a woman who is pledged to be married sleeps with a man, both of the people were supposed to be stoned to death (Deut. 22:22-23). When Mary heard about her pregnancy, she was stunned and concerned.

3. The Gift of Joy

The theme for today's message is the gift of joy. Do you think Mary was able to find joy in such unbelievable news? The answer is maybe not at first, but yes later. Luke 1:46 & 47 says that Mary found joy. She says "***My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.***"

Why was Mary joyful about her pregnancy? There are many reasons but I'd like to highlight two of them today. First, is that Mary is chosen by God. At the time, there would have been many women living in Israel, but God chose among all the women, Mary, to be the mother of the Messiah. Why did God choose Mary to be the mother of Jesus? We don't know for sure, but we know that it wasn't by accident and God intentionally called Mary to be the mother of Jesus and sent the angel Gabriel to give her the news.

In verse 28, the angel says, "***Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you***." "Favored" means "grace" in Greek. In greeting, the angel told Mary that Mary had received God's grace. Mary would not have expected for her life to be used in any kind of extraordinary way. Yet the angel tells Mary that she is chosen by God's grace and that she would be honored by God as the mother of Jesus. Mary was grateful to be chosen by God.

In life, we often think that our lives are the result of our individual choices. Our family, community, country, property, and even our faith can seem like results of our choices. I'm not sure about you, but for me, my family, my friends, my life here, and even my relationship with each of you was not my intentional choice. In all these things, God chose me and led me. This is God's grace in my life.

Mary asks the angel, "***How can this be, since I am a virgin***?" (verse 34). There would be no natural way for Mary to be pregnant. The angel says, "***The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God***" (verse 35). The angel says that Mary's pregnancy was possible by the power of God.

4. The Fulfillment of God's Promise

The second reason Mary finds joy is that in sending Jesus, God keeps his promise to His people. Isaiah 11:1 & 2 says, "***A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit***." In 586 B.C., the kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians. Jesse was the father of King David. Isaiah tells the Israelites that a Messiah will grow from the lineage of David. Since that time, the Israelites had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah. Mary would have learned about the Messiah from her parents and grandparents.

Luke's gospel tells us that God did not forget His promise. The angel reminds us that God allowed Elizabeth to get pregnant in her old age to use her son, John the Baptist. The angel says to Mary that nothing is impossible for God. From a human perspective, Mary's pregnancy did not seem possible. However, Mary learned that God put all these things in place to fulfill His promise and invited Mary to fulfill God's plan. Mary was honored and so said, "***Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word***" (verse 38). When Mary realizes God's will, she submits her life to God and finds the joy of God's grace and of the fulfillment of God's promise.

5. Joy of the Redeemed in Isaiah

What did the Israelites think would happen when the Messiah would come to earth? Isaiah 35:1 says, "***The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.***" Isaiah says that a barren desert would spring to life. God's creation would be joyful with the arrival of the Messiah, the one who would save Israel and us. Therefore, Isaiah says, "***Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you***" (verse 4).

Advent is a time of waiting for the return of Jesus. Although we may struggle with poor health, family relationships, or financial burdens, we use this time to remind ourselves to trust in the Lord and that the Lord will fulfill His promises.

In verses 5 and the following, Isaiah talks about physical healing. "***Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy***." The writers of the four gospels tell us that physical healing happened when Jesus was among the people. When Jesus returns, we expect to see a dynamic change of a new heaven and new earth.

Thus, in verse 10, Isaiah says, "***those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and***

sighing will flee away." God wants the redeemed to be back home with singing and everlasting joy. God will make sorrow and sighing flee away. When the Messiah comes, everyone will find true joy in the Lord.

6. Conclusion

The past two Sundays, we meditated on the topics of God's peace and hope. Today, we meditate on the gift of joy. Do we experience peace, hope and joy this Christmas? In Luke 2:10, the angel says to the shepherds, "***Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of Great joy that will be for all the people***." The angel says, "***I bring you good news***." The birth of Jesus is good news of great joy for the shepherds and for us. Regardless of the circumstances, Christ is still our good news. In Christ, our lives are filled with joy.

We know that not everyone experiences this joy at Christmas. For some, Christmas can be a very difficult time, even for Christians. In these moments, we are reminded and encouraged to share that our joy comes from God's grace and his fulfillment of His promises. That's why Paul says, "***rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice***" (Philippians 4:4).

7. Application

This morning I am going to show you a video clip. This video will explain why we experience joy at Christmas. The video is about a Chinese girl and her father. The two were separated for 13 years. The daughter went missing at five years old and was adopted by an American family in 2012. She studied at the University of Illinois when she began to search for her birth family. When she first came to the US, she cried every night. Her father missed his daughter very much. He never gave up on searching for her. A DNA test later confirmed that they were related.

The joy a father and a daughter have when being reunited is hard to imagine. The birth of Jesus is that same kind of joy. For about 400 years before Jesus was born, the Israelites felt that they were forgotten by God because there was no prophet during the time. However, when Jesus was born, they felt they were reunited with God. God and His children were filled with the same joy as the daughter and the father had.

Mary's was filled with joy when she realized God's favor and grace in bringing Jesus. Jesus brought joy not only to Mary but also to all of us. This is the joy of Christmas that can never go away. The Joy of Christmas is one of the greatest gifts that we have received from God. Thus, we are able to have joy always because Jesus reminds us that we are God's favored ones. God's grace and His love are with us always. May God's grace and love fill your heart with great joy this Christmas and always. Amen.