

## Monday, December 22, 2008

It's Christmas week 2008, but for millions of Americans, the "holiday cheer" is lost in anxiety about job loss, credit crunch, trade imbalance, stock market plunge, global recession and much more. What about you . . . how's your heart as you go into this week?

In the Calvary Church family, 15 of our dear older "saints" have stepped into eternity in the past 20 months. These dear people helped shape Walworth County and Calvary over the decades. In a sense, they form a "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1, 2) and challenge us to find a God honoring path through the mine-field of present day challenges. After all, they weathered the Great Depression, WWII, the turbulent 60's, Vietnam and Middle East wars, terrorism, economic boom/bust and technological development that I'm sure made their heads spin (as it does ours). Look closely . . . do you notice many of our dear older saints seem unshaken by the radical turbulence of our world? Why? What have they discovered over their long journey? Ask them!

This week we'll consider the "Magnificent Mystery of JOY" . . . I see this in so many of our dear older saints, and their secret is what I see in the Christmas characters. Re-read Luke 1 today, and look closely for this: The SPECIFIC, miraculous work of God in the lives of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary as He brought great joy into their personal pain. Zechariah and Elizabeth had no son to continue their priestly legacy. Their life-long spiritual passion and pursuit seemed to have yielded them empty arms and unanswered prayers . . . yet still they trusted, still they lived "upright in the sight of God". Remember, JOY is rooted in HOPE, and in a personal relationship with God hope is never lost, for . . . "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37)! Are you living like you believe that? Look again at Mary's "song" (Luke 1:46-55), do you see her "joy root" is her relationship with and unwavering confidence in her Sovereign God!!

## Tuesday, December 23, 2008

With Christmas Eve just around the corner, how's your "joy" today my friend? Are you troubled by events you cannot control, do you find yourself anxious about the future? I suggest you consider the theme we've had all month: "The Magnificent Mystery". Go ahead . . . just ponder the words . . . what overwhelms you as "Magnificent" about the Christmas story? And what about the "Mystery" aspect of it? The more you learn to take a "wide angle" view of it, the more you'll be simply awed by it all . . . not unlike each person who was personally involved in it. With which character do you most relate?

May I offer you Psalm 3, 4 and 5 today, and look for words of great hope. Note this phrase: "You have filled me with greater joy . . .". Do you agree?

While yesterday we saw JOY as being rooted in the HOPE God always provides because "nothing is impossible" with Him, and He pays close attention to you as an individual and He delights in a personal, miraculous work in your life . . . today consider God also delights opening His arms and His heart to the entire world . . . a "macro" view of Christmas available to every nation in every generation!

While John was announced to Zechariah as a personal "joy and delight", Gabriel also said "many will rejoice because of his birth" and "many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord." (Luke 1), for he was the "forerunner" of the Savior of the WORLD! Note, the angel announced Jesus by "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for ALL the people. Today a Savior has been born to YOU . . ." (global, plural, all inclusive). "Peace on earth . . ." (Luke 2) was the angels' promise!! Do you see that one of the "magnificent and mysterious" aspects of Jesus Christ is that His Presence, Power and Truth can bring peace to ANY person, ANY situation, in ANY place at ANY time? That is good reason for "JOY" in our day, right? Now, do you see synergy between JOY, HOPE and PEACE? Is it vibrantly alive in you this Christmas Eve, eve?

## Wednesday, December 24, 2008

OK, it's Christmas Eve 2008! What state of heart and mind will you maintain ALL DAY to celebrate the "magnificent mystery" of Jesus Christ's visit to our planet? Tonight, three different Christmas Eve services at Calvary, designed to help you celebrate Jesus!

5:00 pm - A Children's Christmas

6:30 pm - A "Heritage Christmas" with familiar carols and message

9:00 pm - A "Contemporary Christmas" with up-tempo music and drama

I can't imagine welcoming Christmas without gathering for worship . . . can you? After all isn't that what you see in almost every paragraph of the Christmas story . . . worship?

Today, let's ponder that . . . look at each character in the Christmas story and evaluate their "response" to their personal invitation into the "magnificent mystery" . . . how did Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Shepherds and the Magi worship God in response to their involvement in the miracle? Consider "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10), for each of these people.

Jot down a few observations:

Zechariah:

Elizabeth:

Mary:

Joseph:

Shepherds:

Magi:

Now, in contrast . . . what response do you see in King Herod, the people of Jerusalem, (Matt. 2:1-18) and the people of Bethlehem (Luke 2:)? What lessons can we learn?

Thursday, December 25, 2008

Today is Christmas Day! Have you considered what today would be like for you if this morning you awakened in Turkey, Nepal, Sudan, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, or so many other places where "Christmas" will not be welcome today?

Would you consider that for some, Christmas is "troublesome", in fact it awakens anger or resentment. In truth, even in Bethlehem today, there are many people who resent the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

Take a moment . . . consider the battle between Jesus and Satan, for you and me, the human race. From the days of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3, 4), through the troubled history of Israel, all the way to Bethlehem, can you see Satan's relentless effort to block God's Redemption plan? Do you suppose Herod's violent response to the Magi visit (Matt. 2) was simply an "emotional over-reaction"?

Now consider modern history. Where and how do you see this "battle" raging in recent times? 'Why', of course is a fair question! What do you think? Why such opposition to a Savior who can bring Hope, Peace, Love, Joy to anyone; can heal any broken relationship or wounded heart?

Romans 1, Ephesians 2:1-10 and Galatians 5:16-26 are three specific passages of Scripture which help us see the battle for your heart and eternal destiny. The event we celebrate this day is hated by Satan and those opposed to God, God's plan of redemption for the human race, and Jesus' purchased offer of adoption, new-birth, Holy Spirit sealing and empowerment, and of course eternal life in God's presence. The reason is simple . . . because Satan, the fallen angels and those who have rejected Jesus will spend eternity separated from God, unredeemable. Such a fate is beyond horrible, yet Satan in his rebellion against God desires that fate for every person, thus his hatred of Christmas. Today, your genuine celebration of Jesus as YOUR Savior, is a great defeat for Satan's dark kingdom. Christmas has purpose when linked with Easter! As you contemplate the wonder of Christmas today, link Luke 2 with John 20 and rejoice!

Friday, December 26, 2008

JOY permeates the Christmas story. Just as Americans will scurry to the stores today in a frantic rush to exchange, return, etc., so the days following the birth of Jesus were frantic! Have you noticed most of the people in the Christmas story disappear from our view shortly after that event, and Bethlehem goes on as if nothing happened?

The Shepherds and Magi remain unnamed and are never seen again. Joseph and Zechariah, we presume, lived long enough to have considerable influence over Jesus and John, but likely not into their adulthood. Herod died soon after the massacre in Bethlehem. Elizabeth we presume raised John, but is not heard of again. Only Mary, the young mother of Jesus, is seen at Jesus' side through the next 30 years and beyond.

I'm struck by the phrase "*Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*" (Luke 2:19, 51).

I presume Dr. Luke personally interviewed Mary sometime after Jesus' death and resurrection. We know Mary lived out her remaining years in John's home (John 19:27). We find her inviting Jesus to engage His first miracle (John 2); visited Him while teaching (Luke 8:19); was at the cross (John 19:26,27); was with them all after His ascension (Acts 1:14) and we presume lived to see the church established in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (Acts 1-8)! Do you see it was a deep heart treasured JOY that kept her going? JOY in her relationship with God, her confidence in Jesus' truth, her unwavering hope that God would accomplish His Sovereign plan for those who believed Jesus.

What things do you "treasure" in your heart? Remember what Jesus said . . . "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt. 6:19-34). Is your 'heart treasure' awakening JOY rooted in HOPE, PEACE, LOVE deep within you? Is it "contagious Joy" that is overflowing to everyone you know . . . because you know Christmas Jesus?



Pastor Doug Anderson

December 22-26, 2008



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