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Winter 2024-25
Looking Forward to Christmas

Sermon Title: Christmas Gives Us the Gift of Joy

To be used with Session 2: Looking Forward to Joy

Scripture: Luke 1:45-55

Connection with Bible Study: This sermon complements the Bible study “Looking Forward to Joy” by exploring why the birth of Jesus was a cause for joy and rejoicing, not only for His mother, Mary, but also for all those who come to faith in Him. Such joy is based on the relationship with God through Jesus Christ and has little to do with outward circumstances. Mary’s circumstances as a soon-to-be unwed mother might not outwardly appear to be a cause for joy, but Mary found reason to be joyful.

Introduction:

The anticipation of the birth of a child always produces a variety of responses and emotions. For many, such expectation brings happiness and excited anticipation. For others, they may experience uncertainty, anxiety, and fear of the unknown. Have you ever contemplated how Mary of Nazareth felt when she learned she was pregnant? While she had the assurance that this was part of God’s plan and that her child would be the long-promised Messiah, don’t you think there was some anxiety and uncertainty about what the days ahead would be like? After all, she was a mother-to-be that was at that moment unmarried. Explaining her situation to others probably didn’t alleviate their suspicion and gossip. Not even Joseph believed her story until an angel set him straight.

In our text, we find Mary going to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth had her own unique pregnancy. If there was anyone that Mary could confide in, it would have been Elizabeth. As Mary greeted Elizabeth, Luke’s gospel tells us that the baby in Elizabeth’s womb “leaped for joy.” Here is the first of many instances of great joy at the coming of the Messiah. This gift of God’s Son is a gift that keeps on giving day in and day out, century after century.

We do not need to speculate as to what Mary felt about her pregnancy. Instead of fear, she was filled with great joy that was expressed through a magnificent prayer of praise. Her joy should be ours as well.

1. We can find joy in what God is currently doing for us (Luke 1:46-49).

First off, realize that while joy contains happiness, it is different in the sense that joy can be found in times where there is no happiness. Circumstances can be difficult and yet there can be joy. Joy is the feeling of delight that we experience as we walk in Jesus Christ. Let circumstances be what they may, we can find delight and a sense of well-being because we belong to God.

Mary expressed her feeling of joy by rejoicing in God's plan for her life. Her faith in God's path for her life bubbled over into a great prayer of rejoicing. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47a). She knew that God was sovereignly in control.

Look at your own life. Regardless of what you are currently experiencing, if Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord, your life and circumstances are all in His hand. He has a plan and a purpose for your life and for anything you are facing. In that fact, you can find joy. You belong to Him!

2. We can find joy in what God will do for us in the future (Luke 1:50).

Mary knew that what God had begun in her would have impact for centuries to come. Through the child to be born of her, generation after generation would find God's merciful salvation. The phrase "generation to generation" means continuously or ceaselessly. God's mercy will always watch over those who fear Him. Mary rejoiced that God's plan extended for generations to come.

What does it mean to fear Him? This is not a cowering fear, terror, or extreme fright before God. It is, rather, a loving reverence for one that we love dearly; it's a desire never to displease Him or dishonor Him in any way.

To those who hold God in such high esteem, His merciful favor will accompany them for all of life. Folks, we may not know what the future holds, but we can know for certain that God is in that future and that His grace and mercy will accompany us every step of the journey. In that, we can rejoice. Joy will be our constant companion because we know that God will be our constant companion.

3. We can find joy in God's past activity in our lives (Luke 1:51-54).

Here's the key for finding joy in the present and in the future. Look back over your life and discover all the ways in which God has been faithful to you—protecting you, providing for you, guiding you, healing you, loving you. God never changes. His faithfulness never ceases. What He has been to you in the past is what He is to you in the present and will be to you in the future.

In her song of rejoicing, Mary looked back over the history of her people Israel and saw God's mighty hand at work continually. "He has done a mighty deed with his arm," was her declaration. Those mighty deeds included bringing down the proud and mighty. God's merciful presence also took care of the needs of the lowly. Because God had been actively at work in the history of Israel, Mary knew that He would continue carrying out His plans in the present and in the future.

Conclusion

Christmas time is always a time when we celebrate the coming of God's salvation. We sing the popular African-American spiritual, "Go Tell It on the Mountain" that speaks of the joy of spreading the news of Jesus Christ. We find a similar sentiment in Isaiah 55:7: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald, who proclaims peace, who brings news of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

In Isaiah, this was a call for the people of Israel to find joy in the fact that under King Cyrus a decree had been issued allowing the Israelites to leave exile in Babylonia and return to Jerusalem. They were commanded by God to depart from exile and return to their home in Jerusalem. This passage in Isaiah ends with a great promise to the Jewish people: “For you will not leave in a hurry, and you will not have to take flight; because the Lord is going before you, and the God of Israel is your rear guard” (Is. 52:12). Here is God’s promise to us – God goes before us to oversee the future and God will go behind to cover the past. Therefore, in our present circumstances, we can find joy in His presence right now. As Oswald Chamber wrote: “Leave the irreparable past in His hands, and step out into the irresistible future with Him.” That’s where the joy is!¹

Dr. Sam Crouch is retired from 52 years in ministry, but currently serves as a part-time pastor. Sam attended Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife live in Tucson, Arizona. He is the author of Clearing the Fog: Gaining an Understanding and Appreciation of the Old Testament.

¹Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1953). p. 366.