

Patrick Stewart as Scrooge, laughing Christmas Morning Bing Videos

Laughter and joy are refreshing. Jesus brings joy, real joy - certainly more joy than Charles Dickens could imagine.

‘Joy is the meaning of human life.’¹

- Joy lets us know we are alive.
- Joy let’s us know that we were created to be loved by God and to love in return.
- Jesus said, ‘Remain in my love. ¹⁰When you ... remain in my love ... ¹¹ you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow (Jn 15:9-11 NLT).’
- Today’s joy is a deposit of the sheer delight of heaven.

Last week, Pastor Justin spoke on Jesus – the announcement of joy and hope. He looked at the stories of John the Baptist’s and Jesus’ birth.

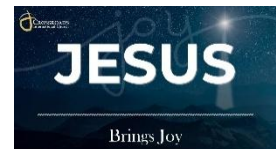
- The angelic announcement of their births.
- The joy of Mary and Elizabeth, Zechariah’s song of joy, and of course, and the shepherd’s joy.

Wednesday night during our one-hour Christmas Eve service (5 p.m.), we will celebrate Jesus’ birth.

Today, we will look at the background of Jesus’ birth, childhood and preparation for ministry. Backgrounds – baseball field or majestic mountains. Photobomb?

- John states clearly that Jesus brings joy: ‘I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (Jn 15:11 NLT).’
- Luke’s biography of Jesus, more than any other, has a background of joy and rejoicing.
- Today’s goal is to see that Jesus brings joy.
- Joy is in the atmosphere of Luke.

Jesus
Brings Joy



¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology and Joy* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1973), 42.

Mark and John skip Jesus' earliest years. But Matthew and Luke go into various parts of Jesus' birth.

Ancient historians did not feel the need to be chronological like they do today.

- Matthew and Luke usually follow Mark's chronology.
- John does his own thing but is highly accurate on Jesus' last week in Jerusalem.
- Ancient historians often arranged their material to create a feeling or to make a point.

Let's start at the stable. Jesus has just been born.

- The barn and baby are both messy.

Someone picks up the child, cleans the mucus away from his nostrils.

Who?² Joseph? Mary? An unknown midwife?

- The creator himself has entered his creation.
- For a moment or two he is in between. He is vulnerable. But he has put his trust in common people, Joseph and Mary.
- At the St. Louis fair in 1904, Sister King saw a new device displayed - baby incubators. She saw the row of babies and thought they were 'half-born.' They were alive but could not utter the 'essential cry' that indicates they were alive because of the tubes in their mouths.³
- Someone slaps Jesus' backside. If they had known what the angels did, they would have been terrified of his power.
- Jesus cries as he takes his first breath. It is cold.
- Irony. The author of life, now slapped to life by His own creation.

Please catch the joy in Jesus' earliest days.

1. Jesus' Earliest Days, Lk 2:8f.

In Bethlehem ...

- First there were the angels addressing the shepherds. 'I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people (Lk 2:10 NLT).'

² Frederick Buechner's question in *The Magnificent Defeat* (1985).

³ Sister King, 'Abnormality', *TGR* 1.10 (Mar 1, 1914), p. 4.

- Then the army of angels praising God, ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth (Lk 2:14 NLT).’
- Followed by the astonished shepherds ‘Glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen (Lk 2:20 NLT).’

Eight days later, Jesus is taken to the Temple in Jerusalem to be legally recognized and circumcised.

- Simeon took baby Jesus and praised God saying, ‘I have seen your salvation,³¹ which you have prepared for all people. ³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel (Lk 2:30-32 NLT).’
- The prophetess Anna saw all this and ‘began praising God.’ She spoke excitedly to ‘everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem (Lk 2:38 NLT).’

From beginning of Luke’s biography to end there is an atmosphere of joy. Luke wants us, his readers to experience joy despite our circumstances.

- In fact, Luke pairs joy with charismatic power.⁴
- At the beginning the angel tells Zechariah that ‘You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his (John’s) birth ¹⁵ ... He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth (Lk 1:14-15 NLT).’
- At the end Jesus appears in a locked room, and they are filled with ‘joy and amazement (Lk 24:41).’ After he goes up into heaven ‘They worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy (Lk 24:52 NLT).’

After the incredible story of Jesus’ birth, Luke is the only one to give us a look at Jesus’ childhood.

- Luke tells us of when young Jesus left behind in the Temple (Lk 2:41-50).
- Mary was anxious (v. 48) but was ‘amazed at his understanding and answers (v. 47)’ with the teachers and elders of Israel.
- And Mary ‘stored all these things in her heart (Lk 2:51 NLT).’

I love how Luke phrases Jesus’ transition into adulthood: ‘And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man (Lk 2:52 NIV).’ Isn’t that great? Jesus grew intellectually, physically, spiritually, and relationally. We, too, should grow spiritually.

But Jesus became the bearer of great joy, the Good News. People were attracted to him.

⁴ J. Lyle Story, *Joyous Encounters: Discovering the Happy Affections in Luke-Acts* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2018), 19.

Let's pause. Why did Jesus enter creation?

2. Why Did Jesus Enter Creation?

Jesus' purpose for entering creation.

- To Preach, Lk 4:43. 'I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent (Lk 4:43 NLT).' Preaching grace is an important part of the picture, but we are called to make disciples, not decisions. There must be more.
- Truth, Jn 18:37. Jesus told Pilate, 'The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37 NIV).' Truth is good, too. But don't think that 1) we will ever have perfect theology, and 2) knowing is not the same as loving.

But 'God is not primarily interested in people because of a job he gives us to perform.'⁵

- Otherwise, God would have made us like robots, fully obedient to His command.
- God could have made us like computers, able to download all the truth, the revelation.

Instead, he created us with freewill and emotions. These qualities are necessary for a relationship with him, for life. Jesus also said,

- Salvation, Lk 19:10. 'For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10 NIV).' Wonderful! Jesus is out there looking for the lost, the sinner.
- Life, Jn 10:10. 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (Jn 10:10 NIV).' God is interested in life. He seeks us and helps us to have an abundant life.
- Joy, Jn 17:13. 'I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy (Jn 17:13 NLT).'

There is something about joy which affirms that we are alive.

- Joy flows out of relationship with our creator more than possessions, or experiences.
- 'Again, I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (Jn 15:11 NLT).'
- The creator has now touched creation for the purpose of salvation, life, and joy – relationship with Him.
- Jesus is God's gift of grace (Ep 3:7) to all who believe.

⁵ Story, *Joyful Encounters*, 11.

⁶ Also, Jn 16:24.

Let's get back to the story.

3. Jesus' Anointing, Lk 3 & 4.

At this point, Luke breaks from Mark's order of events.⁷ Luke does this to connect Jesus' ministry with the power of the Holy Spirit and joy.

One day Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. 'As he was praying, the heavens opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy (Lk 3:21-22 NLT).'

- This is a 'personal Pentecost.'⁸ It prepares and empowers Jesus for God's plan.
- God the father is pleased and has great joy over Jesus' obedience.
- God has emotions and has created us with emotions, so that we can have relationship with Him.

Immediately, Jesus begins to live and follow the voice of the Holy Spirit. 'Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² where he was tempted by the devil for forty days (Lk 4:1-2 NLT).'

- Jesus, the man, had to be fully tempted as we are.
- For us to be fully saved, the second Adam had to be obedient instead of disobedient.

So that we don't miss the point, Luke squishes stories of joy around the announcement that his ministry has started.

4. Jesus' Ministry Begins, Lk 4:16-30.

- Before announcing his ministry in Nazareth's synagogue, Luke notes: 'Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. ¹⁵ He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone (Luke 4:14-15 NLT).'
- Grumpy or critical people rarely attract others. 'Jesus is attractive, emotive, and winsome.'⁹
- After he announces his ministry in Nazareth, Luke tells us of Jesus healing and preaching the Good News. Things were going well, but Jesus said 'I must preach the

⁷ Robert P. Menzies, 'The Spirit in Luke-Acts: Empowering Prophetic Witness,' *Pneuma* 43 (2021), 409-441 (413)

⁸ Story, *Joyful Encounters*, 55.

⁹ Story, *Joyful Encounters*, 55.

Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent (Lk 4:43 NLT).’ He has good news that must be shared.

Those stories of joy are like bookends to this: ‘When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. ¹⁷ The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, ¹⁹ and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come (Lk 4:16-19 NLT).’

Luke records more than Matthew or Mark. Luke includes what Jesus said and what the crowd thinks. They are amazed at his gracious words. 30 seconds later they will turn on him and want to stone him, but their initial reaction is great joy.

Jesus is called ...

- To bring Good News.
- To proclaim freedom.
- To bring healing.
- To set free the oppressed.
- To say that God’s favor has come.

That is great news! That is like me saying, ‘You have all just won the 300-million-dollar lottery. Pick up your winning tickets on the way out.’ Wow!!

He continues, “‘The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!’” ²² Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips (Lk 4:16-19, 21-22 NLT).’

- Jesus brings heaven’s joy to all who follow Him.
- Jesus brings salvation, life, and joy.

Years later, when the disciples reflected on what Jesus did – his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. They concluded two things.

- Only God can save. Jesus was fully God, the Messiah. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins
- Only an obedient man, the second Adam, could reverse sin’s curse. His obedience on the cross undid the disobedience in the garden.
- If we identify with Jesus’ death and resurrection, then we will live a new, sin-free life.

We recently studied: 'And let us run ... ²fixing our eyes on Jesus ... (Who) For the joy set before him he endured the cross (He 12:1-2 NIV).'

There was no joy in Jesus' work on the cross. The beating, the nails, the cross were very painful.

- But Jesus looked forward to what was on the other side. He endured the pain because he saw joy on the other side.
- At the Christmas concert we sang a song from Revelation 19 that pictures that future day heaven. Three times it says 'Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory (Re 19:6-7 NIV).' We have a great and joyous future if we honor God

Conclusion.

But you can have joy right now. The joy of having your sins forgiven. To illustrate the joy of salvation, Luke bundles the joy of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son together.

- The shepherd calls his friends together to 'rejoice ... I have found my lost sheep (Lk 15:6 NLT).'
- The woman calls her friends to be happy with her. 'I have found my lost coin (Lk 15:9).'
- And the father throws a huge banquet celebration over the lost son who returns home (Lk 15:23).
- 'In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents (Lk 15:10 NLT).'

In some cultures, if you receive a gift, you are obligated to give one of equal value in return.

- The Chinese call it 'guanxi' and the Japanese call it 'giri.'
- One of our students in China was obligated to loan his car because he owed guanxi. A parishioner in Japan kept a room full of gifts of various value so that he could immediately repay the obligation.

To not repay would be to dishonor the giver.

Jesus brings joy because he is God's gift of grace to us.

We are not obligated to give anything in return; grace is a gift.

But because we love God, we desire to give a gift in return to honor Him.

The one thing that God values is our life. This is what Jesus meant when he said,
'Whoever loses their life for me will save it (Lk 9:24 NIV).'

Salvation plea.