

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Christmas Day
December 25th, 2012

Grace, mercy and peace be to you... the grace that comes from the manger in Bethlehem... the mercy that is the Word incarnate... the peace that derives from humble beginnings and that is now ours in the flesh as a small innocent child... Today is the day that the Lord has made. Today, God's people are gathered here to celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus. Today is the day when angels sing and shepherd's come to worship. Today is the day that Mary and Joseph... wait a minute... I've said all this before. You have all heard this before, have you not? You know what day it is. You know why we are gathered here... singing the same songs... saying the same things... hearing the same word. The choir sings again... the organ plays again. It's a repeat of last year. It's hard for me to believe that I've done all this fourteen times now as a pastor. Maybe, perhaps, it's time to talk about something else.

Hey, that's a good idea. Let's talk about something else, something a little more modern and new. All this Christmas stuff is just old and outdated anyway. I've got it... let's talk about current events. How about we talk about what's going on in the world right now. That seems different, that would seem and exciting. Let's see, what's going on right now? Well, we have a lot of shootings to talk about – multiple murder/suicides, the Oregon mall shooting, the terrible Connecticut school shooting. Wait a minute. These things don't seem to be a good thing to talk about today. That's all very bad news.

We could talk about something a little more entertaining. How about sports? Let's talk about football. How about those Kansas City Chiefs? We can talk about them. But who wants to? That's just more bad news about a bad team.

We could talk about the beautiful Christmas snow that we got this year. No we can't. For those who like snow and wish it was a white Christmas to remember, it's just more bad news.

Surely we can find good news to talk about today. There's got to be good news. What should we talk about? Well, now we find ourselves back at talking about the greatest news of all – and the very reason you are here today. The angel cries out to you this morning – even after all the bad news – even in the fears and trepidations that are a part of our life right now – the angel cries out, "*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*" And these words to shepherds, of all people – the dirty and insignificant shepherds. They would be the first to hear about the good news. They would be the first to come with bended knee and worship the King.

Oh we could talk about whatever we want today. But on a morning like this one, there really is only one thing to talk about. There is but one message to share. There is but one Lord made flesh to make this day different from all other days. There is a reason why the news is the same every year. If we have the best news that's ever been given – the greatest gift – the greatest story – we share and hear it time and time again.

It's about time to hear some good news. "*I bring you good tidings of great joy...*" says the angel. The good news is of great joy. Oh how we desperately need "great joy". And beloved, you have joy. That joy has come. That joy is Jesus. You see, joy is so much more than a feeling we seek to find when we are down. Joy lives in the midst of our troubles. Joy is present when our toughest times abound. Joy can be described today like the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. When the son who was lost returned home, the father ran to greet him. There was no greater joy than to have his son, who, as far as he knew, could have been dead, home again.

Joy comes home at Christmas. These good tidings of great joy are found in the most humble of estates – a manger amidst animals. This joy comes onto the world’s scene – it enters into our lives like a long lost son. It is the Sun of Righteousness. It is the gladness amidst the sadness. It is the Lord Himself intervening into a broken world. Our Christmas joy is a lasting joy – even amidst our greatest fears.

Joy comes home on Christmas and the angels announced it with a message that is so meaningful to us. Remember an angel of the Lord appeared to John the Baptizer’s father Zechariah and told him, *“Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son and you will call him John.”* The angel comes to Mary and says, *“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a Son, and you will give Him the name Jesus.”* And we already heard about the shepherds who in their great trepidation heard the angelic message of, *“do not be afraid...”* Don’t be afraid because what I have to give you is joy. I have joy for you and that has flesh. I have joy for you that came into this world amidst fear. I have good news and great joy – it’s about Jesus and even just about Christmas.

Remember the two Mary’s who went to the tomb of Jesus and found there an angel who said to them, *“Do not be afraid, for I know you are looking for Jesus.”* And it says, *“The women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy.”* This resurrection joy is as much for us today in the form of “brand new baby Jesus” joy – afraid yet full of joy.

There is much to fear in this world of bad news. We get anxious and we wonder how much longer we can put up with it – how much longer will the Lord put up with it. But it is true that joy can go along with our fears. It’s true that joy to be had is really there in the midst of all that frightens us, all the bad news, all the hurtful experiences. Christmas joy is not a feeling, it’s not lights and glitter, it’s not decorations or even a grand meal with the family. Joy has flesh and bones and it enters into this world. Joy is what we have in a Lord who will know everything about us – live it and then die with it. Joy puts you first on this Christmas morning and will do the same every single day of your life. Joy will be with you in the good times and the bad. The “glad tidings of great joy” is found in that same old Christmas story that is told time and time again. It cannot be replaced. It stands the test of time.

It’s the same ole story, the same ole readings and the same ole songs. Thank God it is. Thank God our joy never changes – that’s it is something we can depend on – that it is something that endures the test of time. The story is the same and it won’t change. Here’s the story for you. God loves you so much that He came into this world to defeat sin death and the devil – a battle you could not win on your own. God loves you so much that He became a man for you – experiencing every bit of turmoil and discord you experience... and so much more. God loves you so much that in the midst of fear, joy abounds. That joy has a name. It’s Jesus and He is the greatest present for Christmas ever. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.