

Hello everyone, Happy New Year. I was on vacation last week, so i did not preach this Sunday (Dec 29).

We had a wonderful worship on Christmas eve. We video taped it. if it turns out, we will put it on our web site.

Hope your year is off to a good start. We have snow here today. a good 5-6 inches worth. fun fun fun! now it is supposed to get cold-single digit cold. Brrr!

May God richly bless you in 2014!

Pastor Don

“Mary Gives Birth To The Messiah” Matthew 1:18-25 Dec. 22, 2013

When the minister arrived at the church the day after Christmas, he noticed the baby Jesus was missing from the nativity scene. Soon, he heard noise out front. He found little Johnny with the baby Jesus in his wagon. Johnny explained, I promised Jesus that if He got me a wagon for Christmas, I'd take him for ride in it.

Nobody seems to be happier at Christmas time than children. Why is Christmas less exciting for adults? We used to be children, what happened to our joy? Is it because we focus on the work rather than the gift? Children are always focused on the gift. Jesus is our gift from God. John 3:16 tells us that God loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son so that who ever believes in Him should not perish, but shall have everlasting life. Eternal life! Now that is a gift everybody should want. And once we have received it, it should fill us with joy. A Christians' joy is a magnet that draws lost people to Jesus. We have what they are looking for; are we willing to share Jesus with them?

Christian's are supposed to be joyful people. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. Joy is contagious. Do we share ours? Are we happy today? Or are we worried that it is only 3 days 'til Christmas and we have so much left to do?

Norman Vincent Peale tells of a couple he once ate supper with on a train while traveling. The man was a lawyer. He was laid back and easy going, casually dressed. His wife was loud, rude, expensively dressed, and complained about everything. After she left the table, the man apologized for her and said she was in the manufacturing business; she manufactures unhappiness every where she goes. Her unhappiness affected all those around her. Do we manufacture our own unhappiness or do we bask in the joy of Jesus?

Abraham Lincoln once said “Folks are usually about as happy as they make their minds up to be”. How happy, how joyful are we? Robert Morgan said that “happiness is an emotion, and joy is an attitude. Emotions come and go, but attitudes come and grow.”

Billy Sunday once said “If you have no joy in your religion, there is a leak in your Christianity somewhere.” Christmas is not just a date on the calendar; it is a state of mind. W. T. Ellis said “It is Christmas in the heart that puts Christmas in the air.” Christmas began in God's heart and it is only complete when it fills our heart.

What is filling our hearts this morning? Is it the joy of Jesus? That is what Christmas is

all about. Frank McKibben said Christmas is not the tinsel or the carols or the exchanging of gifts. It is the humble heart that receives anew the wondrous gift, Jesus Christ. If we have everlasting life, we should be happy. We should be joyful. Are we?

We all know people who just radiate joy. They are spreading God's joy to every one they meet. What are we spreading? God's wants us to spread His joy to others. When they asked 120 year old Jeanne Calment of Paris, France the secret to her long life she said laughter. Proverbs 17:22 says "*A merry heart does good like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.*" Are we joy filled Christians or are we dry bones?

One of the most memorable lines from the movie "Forrest Gump" is "Momma says life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're going to get." Life is filled with uncertainties; that is why we need Jesus. He is the only true constant in our lives; He alone gives us joy. True joy can only come from Jesus. Many times our gifts of joy come wrapped in sorrow. Our problem is we spend too much time focused on the wrapping and not on the present. We miss the joy because our focus is off. We need to remember Romans 8:28 "

Do we look for the joy or simply focus on the sorrow? Do we truly believe that all things work together for our good/ for our best interest/for our joy?

A shipwrecked man washed ashore alone on a deserted island. Using the few things he managed to salvage from the wreck and from whatever he could find on the island, he built a hut. That little hut was the only protection he had from the harsh elements and the only place he could safeguard his meager possessions. 1 morning he went out searching for food. He returned that evening to find his hut engulfed in flames. He lost everything; he was devastated. He cried himself to sleep. The next morning he awoke and saw a ship anchored off the island. A crew member rowed to the island. He told the man, "We saw your smoke signal and came to rescue you!" The gift of joy he felt at being rescued came wrapped in the sorrow of losing everything he owned. Do we truly believe that all things work together for our own good? (Pray)

Matthew 1 is divided into two parts. The first part is a genealogy of Jesus Christ. Matthew wrote his gospel to prove that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. He wrote to the Jews, so to prove Jesus was indeed their King, their long awaited Messiah, Matthew had to first provide proof that Jesus was indeed a descendant of David. This is very important because the king of eternity would be a descendant of David. In 2 Samuel 7:16 God promised David that he would always have an heir on the throne; "*Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever.*" Matthew traces Jesus heritage back to Abraham through the lineage of Joseph. Now Matthew never said Joseph is the father of Jesus, He just says he is the husband of Mary, who is the mother of Jesus. Mary is also a direct descendant of David. Luke gives us the genealogy of Jesus using her family tree. Luke goes all the way back to Adam in his genealogy. Luke wrote to the gentiles. The good news of Jesus Christ is for all people, not just the Jews. The joy of Jesus' birth is for everyone. Do we share the joy of Jesus with everyone?

Matthew tells us that Mary was betrothed to Joseph, and that Joseph was a just man. Technically Mary and Joseph weren't married at this time; they were engaged. They had not stood in front of the preacher and said I do; but they did have a legally binding marriage contract. Under Jewish law, they were considered married even though they did not live together. A divorce was necessary if a couple changed their minds and decided not to get married during this engagement or betrothal period. So now Joseph had a problem. Being an honest man with integrity, he wanted to do the right thing. The problem was that his espoused wife Mary was with child. A child he knew was not his. What should he do? What would we do? He had at least 3 choices. First, he could ignore the fact that he was not the baby's father and go ahead and marry her anyway. Second, he could publicly announce that the baby was not his and have her stoned as an adulteress. Or 3rdly, he could divorce her quietly and privately.

You see, this is the wrapping of sorrow Mary's gift of joy came wrapped in. She was chosen to give birth to God's Son, a great joy, but she literally risked her life in doing so. Joseph could legally have her executed. God honored Mary by choosing her to be the mother of His Son, Luke 1:28 " But He also will cause her great pain as she watches Him die on the cross. Luke 2:34-35 *Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against*

³⁵ *(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*" We all receive some joy wrapped in sorrow; do we focus on the gift of joy or on the wrapping of sorrow?

Joseph's joy of being chosen to raise God's son was wrapped in doubt & unbelief.

Matthew says Joseph a just man, meaning he is a man of integrity, so he studied this problem; he meditated and prayed about it. He was a Godly man. He knew Mary was a Godly woman. He loved her. He needed to know God's will for this situation, so I'm sure he prayed long and hard about it. We all need to pray and seek God's will for the answers to the problems life throws at us. Through prayer, thought and bible study, God reveals His will to us. Verse 20 says while he thought about these things; how much time do we spend praying and thinking about the problems we face? Sometimes we find the answer in God's word, some times God reveals His will for us in Godly council, other times He might even send us the answer in a dream. 5 times in these first 2 chapters of Matthew, God instructed people with dreams. Four of those times it was Joseph He instructed. Do we prayerfully seek God's will? Joseph got his answer.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him what to do. The angel told him Mary was carrying God's Son and he need not be afraid to marry her. The angel said that this child would save the people from their sins. The angel said to name the baby Jesus, which means the Lord saves. Joseph obeyed God. He married Mary and knew her not until after she had given birth to Jesus. This is important because the Messiah was to be God's son, not mans. Therefore his mother had to be a virgin. Matthew is making sure his readers know Mary was a virgin through out her entire pregnancy, from conception thru birth. This virgin birth fulfilled Isaiah 7:14 "*Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign; behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Immanuel.*" Immanuel means God with us; God in the flesh. This is exactly what Jesus was. John 1:1 puts it this way; "*In the beginning was the word, and*

the word was with God, and the word was God.” Then John 1:14 *“And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* Today Jesus is still with us, he lives in the hearts of all believers. Is He living in our hearts this morning?

Today there is joy to the world because Christ has come. Jesus is the savior of the world. God promised us a savior all through out the Old Testament. He first mentioned him in Genesis 3:15 *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, between her seed and your seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* This message was spoken to the serpent after he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He, Satan did indeed bruise Jesus’ heel, he had him crucified, but Jesus won victory 3 days later on Easter morning, by being resurrected. Jesus will win final victory one day by crushing Satan’s head and casting him and his followers into the lake of fire for all eternity.

Believers can have joy in the knowledge that they will spend eternity with Jesus in heaven. We know that Jesus is the messiah, because he is the seed of the woman. Mary’s virginity makes Jesus her seed, not mans because no earthly man was involved. Jesus is the Son Of God, the Messiah, the seed of the woman, the Savior of the world. Joy to the world, the LORD is come! As humans, we can find joy in the fact that Jesus was also fully human. He experienced everything that we experience. There is nothing that any of us will ever go through that Jesus will not understand or go through with us.

Jesus was totally human yet at the same time totally God. This is hard to understand, but that is ok, we don’t have to understand it, we just need to believe it. Faith and obedience help us to have the joy of Christ in our own lives.

Because Mary had faith, she believed the angel Gabriel and said to him *“Behold the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.”* Mary had faith in God and His plan. Her joy far out weighed her sorrow. Jesus grew and developed in Mary’s womb, eventually people began to notice. They could see him developing inside her. What about us? Are we filled with the joy of Jesus? Do they see his joy, love and peace in us? People, in whom Christ is formed, will have Him show through them. Can others see Jesus in us? Do we have the Joy of Jesus this Christmas season? Do we share it?

Christians loose their joy because they loose their focus. What is our focus today? The things we must get done by Christmas, or our God? The joy or the sorrow? Keeping our focus on Jesus keeps our joy. Joy is spelled j-o-y. The J stands for Jesus; the y stands for you; and the o stands for zero, nada, nothing. We get joy when there is nothing between us and Jesus. Is there anything between us and Jesus this morning?

At Christmas time, it's easy to get caught up in the hustle & bustle of the season; it is easy to get stuff between us & Jesus; it is easy to lose our focus. Our focus needs to be on the joy of the baby in the manger; not the sorrow of the work that surrounds it. Jesus is what Christmas is all about. It is His birthday that we are celebrating. Is Jesus our focus this morning? The Christmas decorations help us focus upon Jesus. Everything points us to Him. The lights remind us that he said in John 8:12 *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."* The evergreens remind us of Jesus because they represent eternal life. Jesus gives us eternal life. 1John 5:11 says *"This is the testimony; that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."* Jesus tells us in John 11:25 *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me though he may die, he shall live."* Vs. 26 continues *"And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."* Then Jesus asks us this question, do you believe this? If we do, we have great reason to be joyful don't we?

We have good news of great joy to share with all people. You see, Jesus did not stay a baby. He grew into a man. He died for our sin. Not just ours, but the sin of the whole world. It is His atoning death, burial and resurrection that gives us peace with God. It gives us the hope of eternal life. It fills us with God's love which should fill us with joy.

Do we have the joy of Jesus in our hearts this morning? Christmas is all about giving. Jesus gave his life for us; He wants us to give him our heart. He wants us to live for him. Will we do that? Christians should be the happiest people in the world. We have the love of God living in our hearts. We are filled with His peace, which passes all understanding. We have and understand the hope He gives everyone through Jesus; so are we filled with joy this morning? We get the joy of Jesus when we ask him into our heart. Is he living in our hearts today? Can others see Jesus in us? Proverbs 23:7 tells us that as a man thinks in his heart so is he. What are we thinking in our hearts this morning? Are we thinking on the Joy of Jesus or on our sorrows? Peter tells us to cast all our cares upon Him because He cares for us. When we cast our cares upon Him, He gives us His joy in return. Sounds like a good trade for us; have we made it? Are we trusting Jesus today? Are we filled with His Joy? Are we an example of Joy to the world? Merry Christmas! Let us pray.