

Fil-Am Community Church
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18 Dec 2016

The Miracle of the Messiah

Luke 2:8-14

Today is a day of great joy because we're celebrating the birth of Jesus, our Messiah! Amen? Not only that, we're also finishing our series on the Miracles of Christmas! Amen? Christmas is upon us but don't we wish that it is Christmas the whole year round, where there is joy and gladness all around. Where children and grown-ups are always smiling, people are in a festive mood, the surroundings are colorful and bright, food is in abundance, and we receive gifts every time. But such is not the case. It only comes once in a year. And once it passes, we're back to reality and the joy we once had is turned to gloom and sadness and a feeling of being down.

In the movie the Miracle on 34th Street, we saw how Kris Kringle brought joy to a lot of people. We first encountered him at the parade where he was suddenly recruited as Santa Claus by Ms. Walker, who was in charge of the parade, because the original Santa was drunk. The success of that parade resulted in Kris being hired as the official Santa Claus during the holiday season. He became famous and the sales of Cole's Department Store increased bringing untold joy to Ms. Walker and the management. Along the way, Kris also brought joy to different people, like Susan, Ms. Walker's six-year-old daughter, the deaf girl, Bryan Bedford, Ms. Walker's boyfriend and then the whole town in the end. To all of them, he was their savior, the messiah who came to give them what they wished for.

According to our text this morning, the true Messiah came to earth about 2000 years ago for the sole purpose of bringing joy to the whole of mankind. He came so

that he could give each of us what we wished for. And I believe all of us wish to be delivered and saved from a life of hopelessness and helplessness.

Thus, Jesus came to save people from their sins and at the same time help them to live a life with meaning and purpose. If that is not the greatest joy we'll ever receive, I don't know what is. And folks, that is the miracle of the Messiah. That he could bring joy to our hearts this Christmas and for eternity.

Now, the word "joy" deserves a closer look. We know how to spell it but when you first look at the word without a closer look it's easy to write off joy as something that's just not possible for our lives. We look at a verse like 1 Thessalonians 5:16 "*Always be joyful.*" We look at a verse like that and if you've had a particularly tough week, be honest, when you hear a verse like that doesn't it bug you? Always be joyful? I had a tough week! I don't want to always be joyful. I'm not sure I can always be joyful.

For some of you, because of the kind of week you had, you came in feeling bad. You had a rotten week. You feel rotten you don't have any joy. We sing "Joy to the World" at Christmas. To the world! That means everyone. That means everywhere. Is that really possible, joy in this world?

You may have heard someone say before, joy is a choice, it doesn't just happen in our lives. It's something that must be chosen in our lives. The question I've got is How? How do you choose it? It's obviously not just automatic. Even those of you who have been believers for quite some time who come to church a lot realize that you don't automatically become joyful because you read the Bible more or pray more or even come to church more.

How does it happen? Do you work hard at it? Can you lie yourself into it and just pretend that everything is ok?

This morning, I'd like to share with you how to have joy in your life. We're going to let some folks show us how to get from here to there today, some guys who were part of the first Christmas – the shepherds.

They were out in their fields near Bethlehem and God brought them a message of joy. They made some choices, some simple choices that you and I can make today that bring joy into our lives. Do you want to have joy? Three choices that result in joy:

I. CHOOSE TO HEAR THE GOOD NEWS.

Have you ever been really down and the phone rings and you pick it up and it's some good news? All of a sudden, even for a moment, your spirits are lifted. You've just experienced the power that good news has, to bring joy into our lives.

It's the kind of thing that happened to these shepherds the first Christmas. Luke 2:10 says, *"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'"* Not just for the shepherds but for all, this message of good news. They're just out there watching their flock, a pretty boring job. It was not a very exciting time. All of a sudden in that routine ordinary life God brought them a message of joy just like He wants to do for some of us today. You think you just sort of showed up today. But God wants to bring you a message of joy. In the middle of that life God came and said, "I want to bring you some good news." What's the good news? That Jesus came. The good news is that Jesus Christ wants to make a difference in our lives.

The first four books of the New Testament are, let's say it together, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All of these are called the gospels. The word "gospel" is an Old English word which means "good news". That's all it's saying. This is the good news about Jesus that Matthew told, the good news about Jesus that Mark told. The good news is a story of what Jesus came to do.

The good news is the fact that Jesus Christ came to this earth to tell us that God loves us. The good news is that God offers forgiveness for the wrong things we've done and a new sense of direction in our lives.

The good news is that God cares for the struggles you're going through and can also make a difference in the direction of your life. That is the good news that Jesus Christ came to bring.

Romans 1:16 (TLB) tells us how good this good news really is when it says, "*I am not ashamed of this good news about Christ. It is God's powerful method of bringing all who believe it to heaven. Now everyone is invited to come to God in this same way.*" The good news is that God has invited you to have a relationship with Him. He's invited you to discover what that's like. That's what Christmas is saying. God called. He came to this earth in Jesus. He called you. He left a message on your voicemail. Now He's waiting for you to call back. He has texted you. He's waiting for you to text him back. He has messaged you in Facebook. God saw that you have seen it and he's waiting for you to reply. Have you done that yet?

The way you respond is you talk to Him in prayer, "I want this good news to be a part of my life." You see, he called to tell you "I love you." He's calling to tell you, "I want to forgive you and help you with the struggles in your life. He's calling to tell you, "I care about what you're going through right now." That's what He's calling to say. Good news brings joy into our lives.

One of the problems is that joy only seems to last as long as the good news lasts. Have you noticed that? Sometimes it only seems to last for a few moments. How do you find the kind of joy that can last the rest of your life? How do you find the good news that can last the rest of this life, through any circumstance of

life? You look at your life and say, “My life is filled with problems. Is there any good news in that?” There is if you know Him.

James 1:2-3 *“Dear brothers and sisters whenever trouble comes your way let it be an opportunity for joy for when your faith is tested your endurance has a chance to grow.”* Joy isn’t in the troubles. I’m not joyful that I have troubles. Who would be? The joy is in the fact that God can work even through the struggles of life as I put my faith in Him to help me to grow, to help me to change, to help me become more and more like Him. That’s the good news.

Joy is not having perfect circumstances. Otherwise none of us could have joy. Joy is not “Smile and the world will smile with you.” Joy is not “Every cloud has a silver lining.” Some clouds don’t. Some clouds are big, black, dark thunderclouds followed by other big, black, dark thunderclouds. Joy is applying God's truth and God's power to our imperfect circumstances in this imperfect world.

Those of you who are parents. Have you ever gone with your kids to Chuckecheese and played that whack an alligator game? What happens is this alligator pops his head out of a little hole and you hit it and it goes back in. Then it starts going faster and faster. And the more you hit it the more points you get.

How do you have joy in imperfect circumstances? When the alligator of a difficult problem comes at you, you whack it with the truth that God loves me no matter what, the truth that God's growing me even through this problem. And even though the problem is still there, at least the bite goes out of it. It goes back into its hole. If you ever played that game you know they start coming faster and faster. In your family, sometimes you can work on it together; sometimes you get somebody else to help you. But you just keep whacking the problems with the truth that God is working even in the midst of the problems.

You might say, “I’ve lost everything. Is there any joy in that?” There is if you know Him. Hebrews 10:34, “*You even had joy when all that you owned was taken from you because you knew that you had something better and more lasting.*”

Because of what God has done in Jesus Christ, because of the hope that He gives us for eternity you can have nothing to look forward to in this world because this world is not all there is. God is building for us an eternity of joy. That is good news. For some of you it’s the only good news that you can hang on to right now. It’s enough even in difficult times.

These shepherds teach us that. They also teach us a second thing about where joy comes from. It starts when you choose to listen to the good news. It continues when you

II. CHOOSE TO DO WHAT GOD SAYS.

These shepherds heard God tell them to go and find a baby, wrapped in a blanket, laying in a manger, a feeding trough for a cow. They did it. And when they did it they found joy.

Luke 2:15 says, “*When the angel had left them and went into heaven the shepherds said to one another ‘Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about.’*” Why did they go?

Because they believed what God had said. And because they believed what God had said, they went to Bethlehem. They could have spent the rest of their lives wondering. They could have said, “I don’t know if that’s true,” and stayed in the fields outside of Bethlehem and never gone and always wondered, “What would have happened that night if we had gone to see what the angels told us about.” But they trusted what God had said.

Figuratively, there are a lot of us that it’s easy to get stuck in those fields outside of Bethlehem. You hear God say to you “Trust Me with your life, trust Me

with this decision, trust Me with this relationship.” But you just stay there and wonder, what would have happened if I had. Maybe this happened years ago for you. I’m here to tell you this morning that it’s never too late to trust Him.

It’s never too late to go to Jesus Christ and find hope in Him. Never too late. You don’t have to wonder any longer. Today may be your day to trust Him. Today may be your day to ask Him to help you with a decision. Today may be your day to ask Him to give you strength in that relationship. You don’t have to wonder. Christmas is the method that joy can happen in our lives. And joy happens in our lives when you and I decide to do what God has said to do.

He’s our maker. He’s our creator. He knows how we’re wired. He knows how we work. Because of that He says, “Here’s the directions for life.” Not to ruin your life or mess up our life or make your life a bummer. Here’s the directions of life to give your life joy. If you follow directions He’s going to give you the most joyful life possible. That’s the kind of life He wants to give.

In Australia, when God first called me to become a short-term full-time missionary, my first reaction was “I don’t think so. I have a good-paying job. I like the Australian scenery. I’ll become an immigrant next year. Please don’t disturb my life God.” But God was persistent and he has a way of working in our hearts even though we’re hesitant. And when I obeyed that’s when I realized God has given me greater joy. Because I became a missionary I visited places I never dreamt of before. Like New York where I met my beautiful wife.

Joy is doing what God says to do. The Bible tells us in Psalm 97:11 “*Light shines on the godly and joy on those who do right.*”

One of the things God tells us to do is to ask. And He tells us when we ask it brings us joy. John 16:24 “*Until now you’ve not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.*” What are you asking God

for this Christmas? More than likely if it's something on your heart, as a loving Father, He wants to grant that request.

This Christmas, I've asked God for a new job. I've been driving to Richmond back and forth, well with the help of a vanpool, for two hours each way, for the past 2 and a half years, and, boy, that is tiring. Three weeks ago, an opportunity opened up in DC. I grabbed it, prayed about it, went through two interviews, messed up in the second interview and prayed and fasted literally for God to give it to me anyway. And last Monday, the hiring manager called and said, "You're hired." I'll start in January. And this is all because of God's faithfulness and goodness. That's great news for Anabel, because we can drive together to DC and she can relax in the car while I drive in traffic.

Joy comes when you hear the good news. Joy comes when you do what God says to do. Then there's a third thing these shepherds remind us of. Joy comes when you

III. CHOOSE TO TELL SOMEONE ELSE.

When you tell someone else the good news about what God's doing in your life it brings joy. A principle of joy is, it cannot be bottled. If you try to put a cap on joy it sours every time. It has to be shared.

These shepherds immediately shared the good news about what God is doing. Luke 2:17 *"When they'd seen Him (the baby Jesus) they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child."* They went out and immediately told everybody else. Tell someone else. It's what you and I need to do.

Psalm 107:22 *"With joy they should tell what He has done."* With joy tell what God has done in your life. Tell someone in your family, at work, at school. Joy happens when we tell someone the good news.

Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. There's an almost indescribable burst of joy that happens when you share with someone else the good news of what God has done in your life. Because you care about them. You want them to experience the same good news. When you share that with them, you can't describe the kind of joy that comes out of that. It's a multiplying kind of joy.

Now, some of you are going through difficult days, real struggles. Yet your lives are filled with joy. You've chosen to have joy even in difficult circumstances. In spite of the circumstances, you're listening to the good news and you're doing what God says. And you're telling other people. You've chosen to set your heart on the kind of joy that only God can bring into our lives. That's where joy comes from. You choose to hear something and do something and say something. You hear the good news, you do what God says, you tell other people.

Two final verses before we close. Psalm 126:5 *"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."* I know that the holiday season is a tough time. And I know that for some of you this is a painful sermon to listen to today because this is the worst Christmas you've ever had. You're away from your family. You just lost a loved one. You've been feeling pain in your body. You're out of job. You're thinking, "Joy? I don't even want to think about that. Does this mean I have to pretend everything is ok? Does this mean I have to pretend that I don't have a hurt, that I don't have a loss?"

Christmas turns up the volume on everything. If things are going good it makes that season even better. But if things are going bad, if you've had a loss, it makes that seem even worse. How do you have joy in a tough Christmas? *"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."* Don't be afraid to tell God your

hurts. Don't forget that it's a process. Don't think that you have to pretend that everything is ok. Tell God your hurt and then He'll bring His healing.

And then you have the joy. Let Him work that process through your life during this season of the year.

Christmas is a time that most of us enjoy. Statistics say that for 75% of us it's our favorite time of the year. Yet it's just a season. How do I have the kind of joy that lasts for more than a few weeks, that lasts for more than a season of life?

Philippians 4 *"Be full of joy in the Lord always. I will say it again. Be full of joy."* That's where it comes from. Joy isn't based on our circumstances. It's based on Christ. It's in the Lord that I can find a joy that really lasts. He's already called you. He's connected with you, that's what Christmas is saying. He wants to have a relationship with you.

Now you need to respond. Perhaps for the first time. Today, say to Him "I do need to trust You, Jesus Christ. I realize it's not about a religion, it's about a relationship with You. That's what Christianity is. I need to trust You with the wrong things I've done for Your forgiveness. I need to trust You for direction." You may have been thinking about this for a long time but it may be hitting you right here for the first time in this moment. God's gift to you this Christmas is a gift of joy. He wants a relationship with you. You start that just by talking to Him in prayer. By trusting Him. By telling Him. Let's take that opportunity right now. And if you have a relationship with him already...