

A Message of Joy

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, do you have a seat and turn the page and you'll find there some readings from Luke's Gospel, chapter 1. And I will read these excerpts together. First of all, Zechariah's response to the angel's promise to him.

And Zechariah said to the angel, How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years. The angel said to him, I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God. And I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the days these things take place.

Because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their time. Then after the angel met with Mary, she responded this way.

And Mary said to the angel, How will this be since I am a virgin? The angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

[1 : 05] Therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son. And this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

And the angel departed from her. In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah. And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women.

And blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

[2 : 05] And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. We'll do have a seat and keep that page open before you so you can see the readings that we have there from Luke's Gospel.

We're looking for the third time this morning at this little passage, the very last paragraph there in Luke's Gospel, at verse 39 beginning. And today it's all about a message of joy.

When Jesus came into the world, poetry expressed itself and music was reborn. Remember we quoted those words from the preacher George Campbell Morgan.

You remember also I shared with you some of those words from Martin Luther. He said this, Next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.

Well, I think Luke would have agreed, wouldn't you? Because his account of the birth of Jesus is full of songs, songs of joy. There's joyful singing everywhere in these early chapters of his Gospel, isn't there?

[3 : 13] There's Mary's song, the Magnificat. I was listening to Bach's Magnificat the other day and it was magnificent. But there's Zechariah's song, there's Simeon's song, there's the song of the angels singing in the heavens.

There's singing everywhere, isn't there? And we've been looking at these verses which actually teach us about the very first song of all, Elizabeth's song, when Mary comes to visit her, when the unborn baby Jesus is just a tiny embryo in her womb.

And you remember first of all, a couple of weeks ago we looked at the very first joy, the joy experienced in the womb by the unborn prophet, by John.

Look at verse 41 there. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And verse 44. Behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb

leaped for joy.

No doubt, is there? It's very real joy, experienced amazingly, miraculously, it must be, in the womb. And then moved by that leaping for joy of the baby in her womb, Elizabeth herself gives expression to that joy, to the joy she senses in the coming of Jesus there in verse 42, isn't it?

[4 : 33] She bursts out in song. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

You see, she's expressing, isn't she, the real joy of knowing that her Lord has come to her at last. But you see, the Bible doesn't just give us the facts.

It doesn't just tell us the facts that here were two women overcome by joy. That explains to us exactly why they were overcome by joy. Why was there such joy?

Well, it's not just a matter of emotion, is it? It's not just two pregnant ladies with their female hormones going a bit haywire, getting too excitable. That happens, doesn't it? But it's more than that.

Now, it's considered joy. It's rational joy. It's highly intelligent joy. It's joy in the message of God to them, which is a message of real joy.

[5 : 32] It's joy to them, and it's joy to the world. So let's think about that for a moment. Because their joy is firmly rooted in one place, isn't it? It's rooted in the word that comes to them from God.

It's joy in the word from God. And the road to joy for both of these women was belief and trust in the word of God's promise to them. Mary believed, says Elizabeth, in verse 45.

Look. She believed that God's word would be fulfilled. She believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord through the angel. Mary had believed, where of course Elizabeth's own husband hadn't believed, had he?

Poor old Zechariah. Do you remember that? Look back in verse 20. Zechariah did not believe the angel's words to him. And that unbelief, well, that led him into a great misery and dumbness, didn't it?

You will be silent, said the angel, unable to speak until the day that what I've said was going to take place does take place. But Mary was different. Mary did believe the promise of the angel to her.

[6 : 40] And it led her, not to dumbness, but to rejoicing. It's funny, isn't it? Zechariah's unbelief led him to have his mouth shut. But Mary's belief led God to open her mouth in praise.

And in fact, the very next thing in Luke's gospel is her song. But you see, verse 45 could apply just as well to Elizabeth, couldn't it? Because Elizabeth too had believed God.

She'd welcomed the message that God had brought her. She'd welcomed it with great joy. Both Mary and Elizabeth, full of joy, because they believed and welcomed the message of God.

You see what Luke's telling us. He's telling us that the way to joy, real joy, in the human life, is belief and trust in God's word.

Believing and trusting that God's word is true. And that all his promises will be fulfilled. That's what he's telling us. Strange, isn't it?

[7 : 40] Because our world doesn't believe that, does it? That's why so many people in our world actually think that the way to joy and to real happiness is in rejecting God's word. It's in ignoring God's ways.

It's acting as if God's word was the very thing that wouldn't give you joy at all, that would cramp your style and stop you finding the fulfillment that you want. Well, you tell me.

Is our world, our God-rejecting world, is it full of joy? Have the people of our world found great joy and fulfillment by not listening to God's word?

I don't think so. But the message of the angels, you see, is that God is a God who keeps his word. He keeps all his promises of salvation. And Mary and Elizabeth, you see, they trusted God.

And they find the great truth that when you do trust God's word to human beings, it's the road to joy. The road to real, personal, lasting joy.

[8 : 43] And they also discovered that it's to be caught up in something wonderfully personal as well as something wonderfully vast and cosmic and eternal. It really was a joy unspeakable and full of glory that they found, as Peter the Apostle called it later on.

But the way to that joy, the only way to that joy, is through the word of God, through the gospel of God. Mary exemplifies one side of that faith and trust.

You see, when Mary heard the word of the angel, she believed. Look at verse 38 again. What did she say? Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

You see, she submitted to God's truth. She bowed the knee to God. Let it be so for me, she said. And that's faith. That's what the Bible means by faith.

Obedience to God. Bowing the knee to God. And Elizabeth just exemplifies another side of the same thing. You see, she heard the news and she believed with joy and she rejoiced in God's truth. [9 : 47] Blessed is the fruit of your womb, she said. Blessed be God. She rejoiced in the gospel of God. And that's faith according to the Bible. It's a submission to God that rejoices.

It's a rejoicing in God that submits to his word. That's faith. And it was deeply personal. You see, these women rejoiced in the gospel message.

They believed in the promise of God. And they were caught up in something bigger. They were lifted way beyond their own little world of just being ordinary people, living ordinary lives.

And their personal stories, their stories became part of God's story. Their lives were woven into the great tapestry of the story that God himself has been weaving from the beginning of time.

And will go on all through eternity. They became part of it. Just plain, ordinary people. Mary, Elizabeth, others.

[10 : 46] Just like you and me. But changed forever. Transformed. Given a destiny forever. Because. Because they rejoiced in the promise of God.

Because they believed and trusted the message of God to human beings. That's where their joy came from. And that's the joy of Christmas. Joy.

In. The word. That's. The message of Jesus Christ. That brought joy. To Mary and Elizabeth. That's. The explanation.

For their great joy. And for their song. But you know the truth is that nothing has changed. The road to joy in the human life is. Is just exactly the same today as it was.

Two thousand years ago. And just the same here. As it was on the hills of Palestine then. The joy that.

[11 : 46] That can still break in and transform lives of ordinary people. People like you and me. It's the same joy. And it's the same road. And that's why Luke. You see. Painstakingly researched.

All of these things. And wrote them all down for us. That we might have a sure account. That we might be certain of the things we've been taught. Not just joy in the womb for John.

Not just a message of joy. For the women to express in their song. No. It's joy for us also. It's joy to the world. As we just sang. It's a wonderful offer.

Joy from God. And it's just as wonderful today. Two thousand years on. Even though all of that time and geography separates us from them. See if you're a Christian today.

If you're a believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then that means that Elizabeth's experience of joy is yours also. Just the same. It's just as good. In fact. It's better. Paul tells us that in Ephesians chapter 1.

[12 : 47] He says. When you believe Jesus. You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. To the praise of God's glory. That's what happened to you. So you also can sing for joy.

Like Elizabeth. Full of the joy of the Lord. Full of the Spirit of God. And in fact. You have everything that she had. And more. And better.

Because Elizabeth believed everything that God had said. Would still be fulfilled by this unborn baby of hers. And through the life of the unborn baby of Mary. The Lord Jesus Christ. And everything that God promised to her.

We know for sure that God has now fulfilled. And he's made it certain forever. In the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. There was a fulfillment of everything that God promised.

And therefore. Everything that God promised to them. That we read about in that Bible passage. Is promised to us. And can be true for us. And is true for us. If we're Christian believers.

[13 : 49] For all eternity. There is joy to the world. For us. Just as for these women. And that's the real message of Christmas. Joy for us also. Joy for all believers.

That's why we sing. Good Christian men rejoice. The joy of Christmas is for every believer. Jesus himself. Remember he said that.

Even the least person in my kingdom. Is greater than John the Baptist. Even though he said John the Baptist was the greatest prophet. The greatest man even. Who had ever lived until that time.

And even the least of us is greater.

Because. God has kept his promises. And he's given to us. Everything that he promised. Way back then in the prophets. So there's joy at Christmas.

Real vibrant joy. If you're a Christian believer. You should share it. You should sing joyfully. There's no excuse for singing carols with a long face. Martin Luther would call you a clodhopper.

[14 : 46] He wouldn't be pleased with you. He wants to see smiles. And joy. So remember that when you're singing your carols. But what about if you're not a Christian. Not a believer.

Maybe you just like the carols. You've wandered in here. You like a bit of Christmas. What about you? Well if the Christmas message is joy to the world. And you're part of the world aren't you? It must mean there's joy offered to you as well. Mustn't there? If you'll hear the words. If you'll join the joy. If you'll accept and believe as Mary and Elizabeth did.

There's still joy for all the true hearers of the Bible's message. All who receive it with joy like Mary did and Elizabeth. Who trust it with all their heart. Who take hold of the things that God has spoken. In his word. And all who express that trust. In bowing the knee as Mary did. In telling forth the joy of your heart as Elizabeth did.

[15 : 48] That's what it means to find the joy of Jesus. Become a believer. An inheritor of the promises of God. Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it in his letter to the church in Rome.

For with the heart one believes and is justified. And with the mouth one confesses and is saved. You see both those things. Trust in your heart. Belief as Mary did. And joyful confession on your lips. A song of joy. That's always the way. They go together. And it's true for all.

Paul says there's no distinction. Listen how he goes on. For the scripture says. Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew or Greek or anybody else.

The same Lord is Lord of all. Bestowing his riches. Listen. On all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[16 : 48] Do you get that? Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Saved? What does that mean? Well as the angel says to Mary.

Saved from their sins against God. From their ignoring and rebelling against the God who made them. And who owns them. But saved by the child that she will call by his name Jesus.

Because he will save his people from their sins. From the calamity of our human experience. And that's God's way always. He is the God of gratuitous grace and mercy.

He came to Elizabeth way back then. And she found everlasting joy. Joy in the Lord who fulfilled all his promises. Everyone. And he comes to us today. Just the same.

And faith. The response that brings joy. It always comes the same way. It comes by hearing. So the message of Christmas. The message of the angels. The message of God himself.

[17 : 47] To every one of us. And every one of you. And especially. If you've never yet joined the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ. The message is this. Be like those first hearers this Christmas.

Sing for joy. For blessed is she. Says verse 45. Or he. Or anyone for that matter. Who believes. That there will be a fulfillment.

Of what was spoken from the Lord. If you've ever wondered what God is saying to you. This is what he's saying. Join.

The joy. Of my holy son Jesus. This Christmas. And if you've already joined the joy. Share the joy. Of my son Jesus.

With others. This Christmas. That's what his message is. To you. Today. Well we're going to sing. To end our carol service. Before we go for men's prize.

[18 : 43] The last hymn on the sheet. Do notice the second half of verse 4. Where faith receives the gospel word. A breath of life he imparts. Now seal the sun's.

The pledge of life. His spirit. In our hearts. That's. What God can do for you. This Christmas. If you'll respond like Mary. And Elizabeth.

And believe his word. And receive his joy. His joy.