

**Joy To The World
(Christmas 2020)
Luke 1:46-56, 2:1-7
"Finding Joy in Trying Times"**

Introduction

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies The LORD, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because He has looked with favor on the humble condition of His servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, because The Mighty One has done great things for me, and His Name is holy." **Luke 1:46-49**

A few years ago, back when it was acceptable to attend a music concert without risking your health and life, my wife and I attended an Oak Ridge Boys Christmas concert. (This is by no means a "spiritual endorsement" of The Oak Ridge Boys, I just happen to enjoy their music.) Anyways, we had a great time listening to all the Christmas Songs and just soaking up the whole "holiday spirit", you might say. After the concert, Sandi bought me the group's latest Christmas CD, which I have enjoyed immensely over the past few years.

One of the songs on that CD is entitled "*The Most Inconvenient Christmas*". As goes the typical country song, it is told in the form of a story. It is about a family traveling for the Christmas holiday to go and visit their grandfather. As the humorous story unfolds, we see the family experiencing one mishap after another. The car breaks down, and they have to spend the night in a truck stop until the repairs are finished, only to arrive a "grandpa's" to find out that he had hung some faulty Christmas lights that caught fire and burned his house to the ground. Needless to say, it was a pretty unfortunate Christmas! But then the chorus of the song goes on to say, that although all this was inconvenient, "*the most inconvenient Christmas ever was, was the first*".

I think that we sometimes forget that when our Savior was born, it wasn't the most wonderful time for His family. Our Savior came amidst some very difficult circumstances, to say the least. Mary, who was probably only about fourteen years old, would have been considered an outcast by everyone she knew. Because, let's face it, NOBODY would have believed her story of immaculate conception.

After all, even Joseph didn't believe it, until the angel of God convinced him otherwise. And I seriously doubt that the angel Gabriel went all through the village appearing to everyone, so that they wouldn't give Mary any grief over her "condition". And even if an angel appeared to them, many still wouldn't have believed. Just look at old Zachariah. He was a priest, standing in front of the holy of holies offering incense (**Luke 1:5-23**), and he didn't trust the word of the angel who appeared to him there!

People like to believe the worst. It's just human nature. And one doesn't have to be much of a student of humanity to realize that Mary probably wasn't treated very well by her friends and neighbors. In fact, were it not for Roman rule that would not allow the citizenry to take the law into their own hands, Mary more than likely would have been stoned to death by her "friends". Needless to say, although they were unable to execute her, they had often murdered her in their hearts. And yet, rather than feel sorry for herself, what was Mary's response to all that God had asked of her?

'See, I am The LORD'S servant,' said Mary, 'May it happen to me as you have said.' **Luke 1:38**

Her prayer here is so very similar to the one that Jesus prayed before He suffered and died on the cross. It is simply put, "Thy will be done". She had the faith to trust in God The Father's plan even though, in the short term, it may be inconvenient. Mary was willing to be inconvenienced, if it meant bringing glory to God. And through it all, she "**rejoiced in God her Savior**" (**Luke 1:46**).

Two thousand twenty has been a difficult year for us all. And most of us would like to see it end swiftly, but let's face it, its not like we have it in writing that 2021 will be any better! So what are we, as God's chosen people, to do in the midst of these trying times? We are to hold on to the JOY that we have been given in Christ Jesus! That's what. We **Rejoice** that we are chosen, **Rejoice** that HE is Sovereign, and **Rejoice** with those who rejoice!

Rejoice (for you have been chosen) Luke 1:46-56

After Mary was told by the Angel Gabriel that she had been chosen by God to give birth to the long awaited Messiah, she left Nazareth to go and stay for three months with her cousin Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant herself at the time of Mary's arrival. She herself had been chosen to give birth to John The Baptist, who was foreordained to be the forerunner of The Christ. We have all heard the story in *Luke's* gospel of how the unborn John leapt within Elizabeth's womb as Mary approached. If there ever was an argument against the barbaric practice of abortion, this would be it. The unborn child was aware that he was in the presence of God incarnate, while both were yet unborn!

We tend to gloss over, just how much undeserved shame had been forced upon Mary in Nazareth. Her innocence was proven by the fact that she chose to take refuge in the home of a priest during her pregnancy. For if she had been guilty of any kind of immorality, she would have never gone to a priest. Sin doesn't long to be exposed in the light, but innocence has nothing to fear from the presence of God. Although Mary wasn't perfect, she had been declared righteous in the sight of God. And what is it that allows God to declare His people as righteous? Faith. When we believe God, we are given righteous credit (**Genesis 15:6**). Mary was not sinless, as the Catholic doctrine teaches. She was a sinner saved by God's grace. Just the same as every other believer.

After her encounter with Elizabeth, Mary bursts forth in a song of praise and her opening statement pretty much says it all:

'My soul magnifies The LORD, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, because He has looked with favor on the humble condition of His servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, because The Mighty One has done great things for me, and His Name is holy. His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him.' **Luke 1:46-50**

You see, Mary praised God, because, in His grace, He had CHOSEN her. The word that the text uses for "rejoices" in the Greek is *agalliao* (pronounced ag-al-lee-ah'-o), and it means to have exceeding joy. Think about that for a moment. Mary was filled with joy, because God had chosen her. It was simply a matter of His sovereign election. Mary didn't deserve the grace that she was given. This is why she sings that God had chosen her in her humble position. She was just a poor girl from a small town. She wasn't perfect. She simply had faith in God. God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble (**James 4:6**). No matter what difficulties Mary was sure to face as the mother of the Son of God, she could still rejoice with exceeding great joy, because God had CHOSEN her!

Why does this matter to us? Do you realize that if you are a born again Believer today, that it is because God, in His wondrous election of grace... CHOSE YOU? Listen to what *The Bible* says on the matter:

For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified. **Romans 8:29-30**

And this one:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. **Ephesians 2:10**

So, how can we have joy when everything around us is in complete chaos? By doing exactly what Mary did! We must always be mindful that we have been saved from wrath, because our God has chosen us! We were hand-picked by a holy God to be conformed into the likeness of His Son, and to do the good works that will ultimately bring Him glory. So when everything around you seems to be falling apart, rejoice in the knowledge that you have been chosen! He didn't choose us, because we were good. He chose us, because HE is good! And just like Mary, all generations will call us "blessed!" So Rejoice, with exceeding great joy!

Rejoice (for your God is Sovereign) Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. Luke 2:1

There are over three hundred prophecies pertaining to the Christ in *The Old Testament*. And Jesus fulfilled every last one of them! That could only have happened if God was in complete control in every single circumstance. For you see, Isaiah and Zechariah had predicted that The Messiah would be called "The Branch", and Micah prophesied that he would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Hosea declared that The Son of God would be called out of Egypt. These are but a few of the prophecies concerning our Savior, and all of them speak to where He would begin His journey here on earth.

For you see, the word "Nazareth" comes from the Hebrew word "Netzer", meaning "branch or shoot". The Messiah was to be a "shoot" from the root of David. The town of Nazareth was so named, because it was a small place that was more of an offshoot than a legitimate town. So The Messiah, in order to fulfill all the prophecies, actually had to come from three different places, Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Egypt. He had to be from Nazareth, so He would be called "Jesus of Nazareth", (meaning the salvation of God, the Branch), and from Bethlehem, the city of David, so that He would be the son of David. It is interesting to note that the word "Bethlehem" actually comes from two Hebrew words *Beit* (meaning house) and *Lechem* (meaning bread), so that Christ, The Bread of Life, was actually born in a place called "The House of Bread (or Bakery)!"

Not only that, but after being warned of King Herod's desire to kill the infant king, Joseph moved his family to Egypt to escape (***Matthew 2:13-15***). And how did Joseph a poor man, manage to pay for this trip? God sent three wise men, who followed a star bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which would more than cover the cost! All this was done by God's sovereign direction, in order to identify the Christ with the nation of Israel, whom God delivered from Egyptian bondage. So The Messiah actually came from three different places, Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Egypt, and only a sovereign God could cause all of this to "work together for good" as it did. These diverse prophecies, that would seem to be at odds with one another, were actually all woven together as part of God's divine plan!

Caesar Augustus was, at the time of Christ's birth, the most powerful man in all the world. He was the favorite nephew of Julius Caesar, and when he assumed the throne, he was considered to be a god by the people. Joseph and Mary were living in Nazareth, when the word came down that all the people had to return to their cities of origin to be counted and taxed. The couple must have saw this as a terrible inconvenience, but the law was the law. They had no choice but to go. Joseph more than likely was concerned for Mary's welfare and decided not to leave her alone in Nazareth with so many who looked down upon her. He probably worried that no one would come to her aid, when the time came for her to deliver the baby. Whatever the reason, he took her along with him on the seventy mile journey to Bethlehem.

Now Caesar Augustus was thought to be the most powerful man in all the world, but little did he know that it was Almighty God, that had stirred him to take the census. God caused everyone in the known world to have to return to the cities of their birth, just so His Son could be born in the city of David! Joseph probably thought that it had been his decision to take Mary with him to Bethlehem, but again, it was all God. That is the very definition of sovereignty my friends. It means to have complete control. And we must never forget... that our God does!

Why does this matter? It matters because we need to be ever mindful that no matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves:

We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

It matters, because we can rejoice in the knowledge that our God is in complete control of our every circumstance. The world around us is what it is today, because our God has a plan, and He is working it out for our good and His glory. So we can have joy in all circumstances, when we remind ourselves of this truth. What may have seemed as an inconvenience to Joseph and Mary was actually a sovereign

God, Who was right on schedule! The same is true for us today as well. So rejoice, for your God is Sovereign!

Rejoice (with those who rejoice)

There are many things in this wicked world that can rob a believer of his or her joy. The two most predominant are sin and sinful people. When Paul was writing to Timothy, his adopted “son in the faith”, he admonished him to beware of “youthful passions (lusts)”

Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on The LORD from a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22

When we hear the word “lust”, we always think of it in a sexual connotation, but the word that Paul uses, “*epithymia*” actually means *a longing for anything that is forbidden*. All sin is rooted in the gratification of the flesh. We sin, when we want what WE want, more than we want what GOD wants for us. Simple as that. Paul encouraged Timothy to “**flee youthful passions**” and to associate with fellow believers, who were committed to following Christ. This is a proven formula, if you wish to hold on to the joy that you have in Jesus!

First, we commit ourselves to living in a way that pleases God, and not ourselves. Unconfessed sin in the life of a believer will always make them miserable. Listen to the words of David, when he refused to acknowledge his sin with Bathsheba:

Completely wash away my guilt and clean me from my sin. For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me. Psalm 51:2-3

You see, David couldn’t escape the guilt he felt from his own sin. And he had lost the “joy of his salvation”. He prays for God to forgive him and give him his joy back.

Restore the joy of Your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit. Psalm 51:12

So there it is, if you want to have joy, then turn away from your sin and confess it to God. I firmly believe that the reason Paul warned Timothy to flee “youthful lusts” is because as we mature in our faith, sin becomes less desirable to us. More than likely it is because we have felt how it can so easily rob us of our joy so very quickly!

The second thing that can rob a believer of their joy is associating with sinful people. I’m not talking about lost people here, for we know that lost people act like lost people. It is our responsibility to reach them where they are. The kind of sinful people I’m talking about here, are those who claim to be Christians, and yet due to sin, have lost their own joy.

Have you ever been around someone who claimed to be a believer, and yet they seem to be angry and negative all the time? Those people are real “*Joysuckers*”. They can take you from rejoicing to depression in just a few seconds! I mean, they are faster than any race car, when it comes to the speed in which they can bring you down.

As Christians, we have been called to Rejoice with those who rejoice, and to mourn with those who mourn (**Romans 12:15**). This simply means that we are to be one in spirit with our brothers and sisters in Christ. What brings joy to them should also make us joyful, and what hurts them, hurts us as well. But I cannot find a single verse of Scripture that admonishes us to “complain with those who complain, and criticize with those who criticize”. In fact, we are taught exactly the opposite.

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. Titus 3:10 (NIV)

And:

But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, and idolater or VERBALLY ABUSIVE, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. 1 Corinthians 5:11
(emphasis added)

We have been commanded to associate with those who call on The LORD out of a **“pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22)**, and to distance ourselves from those who call themselves Believers, but have allowed sinfulness to rob them of their joy, for if we are not careful, they can rob us of our own joy as well. As the old saying goes, “You are, who you run with.”

Do you have any toxic relationships in your life? Are they robbing you of your joy? Is it time to put a bit of distance between yourself and their constant complaining? God has chosen us, He is sovereign over all that goes on around us and has promised to work all things together for our good. If we truly believe that, then there is nothing to complain about now is there? Do not let anyone or anything rob you of the joy that you have in your Savior this morning. Hardship cannot take away the joy that we have in Christ. Do you truly believe that? Then rejoice!

Every Christmas we hear the old hymn “Joy To The World, The LORD has come”, written many years ago by Isaac Watts. Although it has become a very famous Christmas song, it might interest you to know that it was never intended for that purpose! You see, when Isaac was young, he hated the depressing music that he heard week after week being played in his church. He believed that if a person truly had the hope of Christ within them, then the praises that they sang would be joyous, rather than sounding like the music one might hear in a funeral procession.

So Isaac complained to his father about it. And his father admonished him that rather than complain, instead he should write the kind of song that he thought would be appropriate. Soon afterward the young Watts penned “Joy to The World”. It was not a song about the first coming of The LORD Jesus, but the second!

*Joy to the world, The LORD has come, let earth receive her king!
Let every heart, prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing.
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and heaven and nature sing.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground.
He comes to make, His blessings flow, far as the curse is found
Far as the curse is found, far as, far as the curse is found.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness, and wonders of His love
And wonders of His love, and wonders, and wonders of His love.*

A careful reading of these words will show us that those things did not occur when Christ came to us the first time. But they most certainly will, when He returns as King to rule the world! So, if I may add one more reason that the believer should walk in joy this morning, it is because this Jesus; that came to a manger in Bethlehem, Who lived a sinless life, died upon a cross for our sins, and rose on the third day; this same Jesus... is COMING AGAIN! And when He returns, He will forever bring JOY to the world. So don't allow **anything** to rob you of this joy while you wait for His coming. We are His, we are secure, and we shall reign with Him forever. Let us expectantly and confidently hold fast to our hope for His return, and together we shall rejoice with exceeding great... JOY!

And let all of God's people say... TRUTH!!!