

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Second Sunday in Advent, December 8, 2019

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 69:1-3, 235;1, 87, 96, 50.

Lessons: Isaiah 65:17-25, Galatians 5:13-25. John 15:1-17.

Sermon Text: KJV and NIV Luke 2:10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Every Sunday we sing: ***“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”*** Psalm 51:10-12 (KJV)

But sometimes we don't seem so joyful at Christmas. We sometimes may wonder about where the joy of our salvation is. So today we ask

WHERE IS YOUR JOY THIS SEASON?

1. **Where did God's people in the Bible find joy?**
2. **What doesn't make you joyful?**
3. **Where can we find true joy?**
4. **What are you going to do with the joy you find at Christmas?**

In the King James Version of the Bible we find the word “joy” itself about 165 times. In the New International Version, we find the word about 220 times. There are also many synonyms in the Bible for the word joy: rejoice, be glad, delight in, celebrate, be happy. In our hymns, the word joy shows up more than 300 times. Doesn't that make you wonder what God in his Word has to say about joy?

Why were people in the Bible joyful? What joy did God's people, the Jews, have in their lives? When we look at the use of the word joy in the Bible, we find examples such as joy that the Philistines – their enemies – were conquered. We find joy at the time David was publicly recognized as their king.

We especially find rejoicing over blessings that the Lord had given them, individually and as a nation. We find joy at the building of the temple in Jerusalem at the time of Solomon. At the time of Ezra and Nehemiah we find joy over the restoration of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem to protect the temple and God's people. The Psalms often speak of the joy of being God's children and of the blessings which God had given them.

On the other hand, scripture tells us that there was no joy when the Lord is not worshipped and God is not first in people's lives.

From a purely earthly perspective, by the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God's chosen people had waited centuries for the Savior to come and in much of that time many of them had no joy. Many times they were oppressed and disappointed because the Savior had not yet come. As a result, many but not all lost faith.

And despite the many times when God's people disappointed him, turned away from him, rejected him and cursed him, we find many times when God rejoiced in his people. From the prophet Zephaniah we quote only one such verse: ***“The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”*** Zephaniah 3:17 (NIV)

In the New Testament we find joy at the birth of the Savior. ***“And the angel said unto [the shepherds], Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”*** Luke 2:10-16 (KJV) The wise men, the Magi from the East rejoiced when they found the Savior in Bethlehem.

We find joy in heaven over one sinner who repents! Jesus himself said ***“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*** Luke 15:7 (NIV)

When Jesus spoke to his disciples he gave them – and us – reason to be joyful: We read in Luke 6: ***“Looking at his disciples, he said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.’”*** Luke 6:20-23 (NIV) Rejoice over persecution because we are Christ’s children? Yes. For then we are witnessing to all those who persecute us as well as putting our entire lives in God’s hands.

Before his sufferings and death, Jesus assured his disciples: ***“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*** John 15:11 (NIV)

Jesus’ followers rejoiced at the Resurrection. ***“So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”*** Matthew 28:8 (NIV)

They rejoiced at Jesus’ ascension into heaven. ***“Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”*** Luke 24:52 (NIV)

And there are many examples of Jesus’ disciples and their joy about others coming to faith. We read in Acts: ***“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city.”*** Acts 8:4-8 (NIV) And another example was found in the city of Antioch: ***“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”*** Acts 13:52

But aren’t there many things in which we find no joy at this season?

God give his only-begotten Son as the greatest gift possible, to earn for us eternal life in heaven. But do we find joy in other gifts or Christmas presents we receive? Don’t we find ourselves thinking “it’s not really what I wanted.” “I don’t like the color.” “I don’t deserve this.” “I didn’t get them something.” And how about toys. They can be really nice gifts until they break or pieces get lost. So there’s no lasting joy or pleasure in those things. And what about parties and gatherings? Do we really always enjoy such get-togethers? Sometimes there are people we don’t want to see, or there is so much overeating or drinking too much. Sometimes we don’t even seem to find joy when we get together with fellow Christians. Satan is right there, trying to take our joy away.

And all the beautiful decorations! There is no other time of year when so many beautiful, colorful, elaborate decorations are set out. We have Christmas trees and beautiful ornaments and lights in many of our towns. We have many decorations in our homes. And oh, the beautiful wrapping of those gifts that we – or someone – spent so much time on! And then they are unwrapped and the wrappings are thrown away immediately. We see and hear all the outward trappings of Christmas. But they don’t give us lasting joy.

And then there is the music! We hear sacred words often sung by people who are unbelievers. We feel bad because God forbids us to join in that sacred worship music with those who do not believe, teach, and confess as we do. Satan is pulling at us there, too, making us think that we would really be worshiping God when we join with unbelievers in singing words of worship. We want to join in singing, thinking how grand it would be to be part of a huge choir, orchestra, or band joining in music to worship God. But we have to comfort ourselves that in heaven we can be part of an infinite choir of angels praising God in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness! Of course, there is the totally secular Christmas music about Santa Claus and elves and Rudolph. But that music really doesn’t give joy to Christians.

Then we really don’t find joy in all the work we have to do to prepare – either because we think we are expected to do those things or that we want to do those things to try and make people happy. And often we don’t find joy in the attitudes of other people, even people we’d expect would have real joy at Christmas.

How often don’t we hear about “the magic of Christmas” or “the joy of Christmas”? Even entertainment gives us false hopes for joy. We think of movies – cable TV is loaded with them, and the theaters are presenting “Christmas movies”. The TV guides always speak of the Christmas movies which we have been able to watch on TV for months now as if people are finding joy at Christmas based on something – anything except Jesus Christ. You know how the TV or movie guide tells us it is about “so and so finding joy and happiness despite adversity or problems in his or her life.”

So I think you realize that there are many things about Christmas that don’t give real joy.

So where do we find joy, real joy this season?

The Psalmist asks of God. ***“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”*** Psalm 51. But notice the words that immediately came before this request: ***“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.”*** And we dare not forget the fact that only God can make my heart clean. Jesus Christ came to earth to make hearts clean!

Then let's look at the shepherds in our text. If the shepherds were out in the fields with their flocks, they probably weren't the wealthy sheep owners, who would be at home, in their warm houses back in town. So we could guess that these were poor shepherds, not wealthy shepherds.

In addition to being shepherds, they were also sinners. You may not know any shepherds, but you surely know some sinners. But before you start naming them in your mind, look in the mirror. With Saint Paul, you will probably recognize in the mirror the worst sinner you know, if you are really being honest.

These shepherds were like all of us, worrying about their lives on earth, wishing they were better people, with their consciences troubled by the kind of people they knew they were. And, when we look at ourselves and at all people, and all of their problems we know that sin is the root of all problems.

Where was the joy in their lives? Since the time of Abraham their people were looking for a Messiah, a Savior, a Redeemer. Many of their people were looking for someone to rescue them from the power of the pagan Romans who were ruling their country. But the angel told them about ***“good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”*** Luke 2:10 (NIV) It wasn't things the angel brought them. It was good news, glad tidings that the angel was announcing to them. It was words which could work on their hearts.

And what did those words of great joy mean for them? The Savior from all sins was born in their village. This was the Savior promised since Adam and Eve first rebelled against God and fell into sin. Faith in the coming Savior had been in the hearts of at least some of these first hearers of this message of the angel. And now they were to go to Bethlehem and learn about it first-hand – and Scripture says ***“When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”*** Luke 2:17 (NIV)

Where is the joy in our lives?

Don't look for it in all the outward things. Don't look for it in other people. Look for it in your hearts when your hearts have been enlightened by the message of salvation through faith in Christ.

This message means that all those sins you feel so guilty about are forgiven. This message means that all the wicked things you do, and say, and think are forgiven because this child in the manger will pay the price for those sins. He will lead the perfect life you cannot. And then he will pay the price to God for your disobedience, your wicked life, your evil thoughts. He will be punished for all the sins you committed so that by believing in him you may have a clear conscience.

And then what?

In repentance, you turn to God and make him more a part of your daily life. God told his people in the Old Testament that although they had often left him and turned their back on him, he had not left them. He was still to be found where his Word was taught, proclaimed, preached, announced.

You can spread the word like the shepherds, you can tell others what God has told you about Jesus Christ. You can invite others to come and see. You can show what a change Jesus Christ has made in your life.

You know, repentance isn't just a once and done thing. Turning to God isn't just a “well I did it once” and now I've got it made all my life. You learn from what baptism means that our Old Adam with his evil deeds and desires should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance, and die, and that day by day a new man should arise, as from the dead, to live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity now and forever. We must be daily on our guard against being led into sin by our old man, our sinful flesh. We must also daily be on our guard against being led into sin by Satan and the deceptive world around us. ***“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”*** 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NIV) In Hebrews we find this warning: ***“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”*** Hebrews 3:12-14 (NIV)

You won't find the genuine joy of Christmas in the things of this world. You will find it only in Jesus Christ and what he has done for you.

All the things, the sights, the sounds, the trappings of the world at Christmas can distract us from the real meaning of Christmas. At Christmas we are reminded of the joy of our salvation. Jesus Christ is that joy. Jesus Christ gives you that joy. Jesus Christ gives you that joy abundantly so that you can turn around and share it and show it in your lives, your actions, your deeds, your words. We close today with this benediction from the letter to the Christians in Rome: ***“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”*** Romans 15:13 (KJV) Amen.