

## Christmas Bible Study #3 - Joy

(for sermon on 17-Dec-2023)

### Before we begin, what gives you great joy?

- *Meaningful relationships – family, friends and spouses*
- *Personal and professional accomplishments*
- *Family gatherings*
- *Acts of kindness*
- *Creative activities: art, music, writing, movies and cooking*
- *Following your favourite sports-team*
- *National events and successes*
- *Church family gatherings/worship/hymns/songs*
- *When God's Word speaks to me*
- *When someone chooses to follow Jesus!*
- *Joy in knowing that Jesus has defeated sin and death!*

### Read Psalm 98:1-9

1. What does the term “**new song**” in verse 1 suggest?

*The concept of the “new song” means there should be something fresh and dynamic about worship and the songs we sing to God.*

*Spurgeon puts it this way: “Miriam didn’t use an Egyptian song. Deborah didn’t use Miriam’s song; there must be new songs on new occasions of triumph.”*

*A “new song” suggests a reason to praise God – God has acted or answered or accomplished a victory or performed amazing things!*

2. What things does the psalmist say the Lord has done in verses 1 to 3?

- *He has done marvellous things (v1)*
- *His right arm and holy arm have worked salvation for Him (v1) – i.e., God wants to give people salvation*
- *God has made His salvation known and revealed His righteousness to the nations (v2) – i.e., God’s salvation is not a secret*
- *God has remembered His love and faithfulness to Israel (v3) – remember the covenant promise made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David.*
- *All the ends of the Earth have seen the salvation of our God (v3) – this is achieved by the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the World*

3. What does the psalmist say to do in verse 4? How is that expressed in verses 4 to 6?

*That we should shout for joy to the Lord and burst into jubilant song with music. Because salvation is available to the whole Earth; it stands to reason that the whole Earth should rejoice!*

*This joy is expressed:*

- *Shouts for joy to the Lord (v4) – a spontaneous shout that comes when greeting a King – like on Palm Sunday, when King Jesus rode into Jerusalem*
- *Jubilant song with music (v4)*
- *Music to the Lord with the harp and the sound of singing (v5)*
- *With trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn (v6) – horns often accompany big events like jubilees and anointing of Kings*
- *With shouts for joy before the Lord, the King (v6)*

4. Who is giving praise in verses 7 and 8?

*We see "Creation" itself is praising God:*

- *The sea and everything in it (v7)*
- *The world and all who dwell in the world (v7)*
- *Rivers clap their hands (v8)*
- *Mountains sing together for joy (v8)*

5. What is the reason given for this praise in verse 9?

*The reason is because the Lord comes to judge people on the Earth in righteousness and equity. In a world where justice is not always metered out fairly; where sometimes judges can be bribed or are prejudice or corrupt; God comes with righteous justice, which is a great relief to those who are oppressed or denied justice.*

6. **Ponder:** How does Psalm 98 compare to Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55? What similarities do you find? Is this a coincidence?

*Here are some points of comparison:*

**Joyful Praise:** *Both passages have a tone of joyful praise and celebration. In Psalm 98, there is a call to "sing to the Lord a new song," and Mary's Magnificat is essentially a song of praise and thanksgiving.*

**God's Salvation:** *Both passages highlight God's saving power and faithfulness. In Psalm 98, it speaks of God's salvation being revealed to the nations, and Mary's Magnificat acknowledges God as her Savior.*

**Reversal of Fortunes:** *Mary's Magnificat emphasizes the theme of God's mercy and the reversal of fortunes for the humble and the lowly. Similarly, Psalm 98 speaks of God's righteousness being revealed and justice being executed.*

**Remembrance of God's Promises:** *Both passages reflect an awareness of God's promises and faithfulness to His people. Mary, in her Magnificat, recalls God's promises to Abraham and his descendants, and Psalm 98 speaks of God's faithfulness to Israel.*

**7. Ponder:** What joy do you find in Psalm 98?

*The joy of knowing that God is victorious over His enemies and is perfect and righteous.*

*The joy in knowing that God's salvation is not just for a specific group of people but is meant for all nations.*

*The joy in knowing God is faithful and just*

**Read Luke 2:1-7**

**8. Why did Joseph and Mary have to go to Bethlehem?**

*The Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman empire. Everyone had to go to their own town to be registered in the census; Joseph's hometown was Bethlehem so they had to travel from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem.*

**9. Why is Bethlehem important? (Micah 5:2; John 7:42)**

*Because the prophet Micah had prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.*

*Also, in John 7:42 as people speculate where the Messiah is to be born, they say that Scripture says the Messiah will be from David descendants and from Bethlehem where David was born. Jesus is often referred to as "Son of David".*

*There was some confusion amongst the people in Jesus' time because Jesus grew up in Nazareth, and many did not realize he was born in Bethlehem at the time of the census, when Joseph returned to his hometown. But after Joseph and Mary and Jesus fled to Egypt, they returned to Nazareth; not Bethlehem.*

*Bethlehem is important because it fulfils this prophecy from Micah 5:2 – and shows that what God says will happen ALWAYS happens!*

*Bethlehem's status as a small and humble town adds a layer of symbolism to the story of Jesus' birth. The choice of a seemingly insignificant place aligns with the theme of humility, emphasizing that the promised Messiah would come in a humble and unexpected manner.*

**10. Why is it important for Joseph to be a descendant of David?**

*Because God promised King David (in 2 Samuel 7:12-13) that someone from his family line would reign forever on David's throne; therefore, the Messiah must be a descendant of David. Joseph being a descendant of David, fulfils that promise from God.*

*In the cultural and legal context of the time, the family line often passed through the male, and Joseph's legal fatherhood of Jesus carried weight in establishing Jesus' legal and social connection to the Davidic line. Even though Joseph was not Jesus' biological father, his role as Jesus' legal father allowed Jesus to be recognized as a descendant of David.*

**11. What does it say about Jesus that He was born in a manger?**

*The use of a manger, which is a feeding trough for animals, emphasizes the humility and simplicity of Jesus' birth. This setting stands in stark contrast to the typical expectations for the*

*arrival of a king or a messiah. It conveys the idea that Jesus, the Son of God, entered the world in lowly and humble circumstances.*

*The use of a manger also sends a message of accessibility. It suggests that the good news of Jesus' birth is not reserved for the elite or the privileged but is open to all, regardless of social status. The choice of a manger aligns with Jesus' later teachings about the kingdom of God and the inclusivity of his message.*

*The manger, traditionally associated with feeding animals, takes on a symbolic significance. It foreshadows Jesus' role as the "bread of life" (John 6:35), emphasizing the spiritual nourishment/feeding and redemption that Jesus brings to humanity.*

### **Read Luke 2:8-21**

12. Why is the message of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds **“good news that will cause great joy”**?

*Because the child to be born is a Saviour; as Matthew 1:21 – Jesus will save His people from their sins. That is really good news, that should cause great joy for everyone who hears this news!*

13. What **“sign”** is given? (cf. Isaiah 7:14)

*The “sign” given is a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*

*Isaiah 7:14 says the sign is: “the virgin [Mary] will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him, Immanuel.*

14. How do the angels confirm this is a joyous event?

*A heavenly choir of angels sang and praised God saying:*

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests”*

*“Oh, tidings of comfort and joy...”*

15. How do the shepherds respond in verse 16? Why?

*They hurried off to see Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. Why? Because they believed the angels' message that a Saviour had been born; and they couldn't wait to worship Him*

16. What do the shepherds do in verses 17 and 18? Is this something we should be doing?

*The shepherds spread the word about Jesus being born and who He is; and what good news it is that Jesus is our loving saying.*

*Yes, we can emulate the shepherds and tell people the good news of Jesus.*

17. How does Mary respond in verse 19?

*Mary treasured up all the things that she'd be told and pondered them in her heart!*

18. What do the shepherds do in verse 20? Is this something we should be doing?

*The shepherds returned giving glory and praise to God for all they had seen and heard. They were the first eyewitnesses to the birth of Jesus. Which is more than a coincidence, because Jesus later referred to Himself as the "Good Shepherd" and He was a shepherd who was prepared to not only look for lost sheep, but to lay down His life on cruel cross for the sin of this world.*

**19. Why two things are done in verse 21? Why are they important?**

*On the 8<sup>th</sup> day, it was time to circumcise the boy – which his parents did.*

*Also, the boy was named Jesus as Joseph was told to do so by an angel.*

*This is important because it shows Joseph was obedient to God's commands about circumcision of the boy on 8<sup>th</sup> day; and also obedient to God by naming the boy "Jesus" as commanded by God through the angel.*

**20. Ponder:** In what ways does the story of Jesus' birth inspire us to respond to God's message with great joy [even though we're Presbyterian] and great urgency?

*The story of Jesus' birth inspires believers to respond to God's message with great joy in several ways:*

***Hope and Redemption:*** *The birth of Jesus represents the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Savior. The anticipation of the Messiah, as prophesied in the Old Testament, is realized in the birth of Jesus. This realization brings hope and the assurance of redemption, inspiring joy in the hearts of those who recognize God's faithfulness.*

***God's Presence with Us:*** *The concept of the Incarnation, God taking on human form in the person of Jesus, communicates a powerful message of God's presence with humanity. The idea that God entered into the human experience, sharing in our joys and sorrows, is a source of great joy. It reminds us that we are not alone and that God is intimately involved in our lives.*

***Good News for All:*** *The angels' proclamation of "good news of great joy" to the shepherds (Luke 2:10) emphasizes the universality of the message. The birth of Jesus is not just for a select few but is good news for all people. This inclusive aspect of the message encourages believers to share the joy of salvation with others and to embrace a spirit of hospitality and acceptance.*

***Humility and Servanthood:*** *The humble circumstances of Jesus' birth, in a manger in Bethlehem, convey a profound message about humility and servanthood. Jesus, the King of Kings, entered the world in lowly surroundings, setting an example for believers to embrace humility and a servant's heart. Responding to this message with humility can lead to a deep and abiding joy.*

**Gift of Love:** *The birth of Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity. The message of Christmas is about the gift of God's Son for the purpose of salvation. Responding to this message involves recognizing and appreciating the depth of God's love, which can evoke a heartfelt and joyful response.*

**Peace on Earth:** *The angels proclaimed "peace on earth" as part of the message of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:14). The message of peace speaks to the reconciliation between God and humanity through Jesus. Responding to this message involves embracing the peace that comes from a restored relationship with God, fostering a sense of inner joy and tranquility.*

**Finish in prayer:** Thanking God for His gift of salvation in Jesus!