

Come Let Us Adore Him: Joy

12/24/2024

Scriptures: Isaiah 9:2-7; Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12); Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

### **House of Bread**

During Advent, we talk about various themes. We talk about hope, peace, joy, and love. All of it culminates in the coming of Christ to Bethlehem's manger. God wrapped Himself in human flesh and put Himself into the mess we made here below. He gives us hope for a future, peace in knowing Him, and demonstrates His love for us by shedding His own blood on the cross of Good Friday. Knowing Him gives us great joy. The story of Christmas is a story of joy. From shepherds in the fields, to the angels in the heavens, the birth of Jesus Christ makes the arrival of a joy so amazing that it changed the world forever.

In Luke's Gospel we see God's plan unfolding in the quiet town of Bethlehem. In Hebrew, Bethlehem means "House of Bread." In ancient times, the place had abundant fields for growing wheat. It's no accident that the One the Gospels call the "Bread of Life," was born in the town bearing the same name. During Bible times, it was known for raising the best lambs to be used in temple sacrifices.

Anyhow Caesar issues a decree and sets the known world at the time in motion. All people must go to their ancestral homes and register for the census. But God's focus is on an unassuming couple and their soon-to-be-born Child. When Mary gave birth to Jesus, she laid Him in a manger – a stone cistern in the floor used to feed farm animals, but also a place where the lambs without blemish were put to keep them unbruised so they could be used in the temple sacrifices. Born into poverty, it was a humble beginning for the Savior of the world!

### **Jesus Comes for All People**

The humility of the manger stands in sharp contrast to the grandeur of the angelic announcement to the shepherds watching their flocks. Shepherds – outcasts on the fringes of society – are the first people to hear the Good News. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord," (Luke 2:10-11). The angel's message indicates that the joy we find in Jesus Christ is "for all the people." It's for everyone.

His birth isn't just for the powerful, the privileged, or the religious. He comes for everyone – rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, shepherd and king. The shepherds' response is the most natural thing, which I think most of us would do. "Let's go and see this," (verse 15) is the gist of what they say to each other. They hurry off to Bethlehem and find the Baby lying in the manger. They recognize what all of that means. The shepherds were rough and tumble kind of guys – respectable people didn't associate with them.

Yet, in the manger – the place they laid unblemished lambs meant to be killed for the sin offering – they see the Baby for whom the angels sang praises.

Those shepherds knew, on that very first Christmas night, that the Baby they saw, was going to die as a sin offering for them. They knew they were sinners, they see this sight, and their hearts overflowed with joy as they glorified and praised God for what they had seen and heard.

### **Light in the Darkness**

The shepherds' joy is rooted in a promise made hundreds of years earlier, recorded by the prophet Isaiah. He speaks of a light – that's Jesus – shining in the darkness. Light breaking into darkness captures what joy is all about. Darkness represents hopelessness, despair, and fear, and light brings clarity, joy, and hope. Isaiah tells us, "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders," (Isa. 9:6).

Isaiah gives some great details about Jesus. He is "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The reign of Christ will never end. Who He is, and how He is, is unchanging. He's faithful and eternal and deserves all our thanks and praise!

We have joy because in Jesus, all the promises of God are fulfilled. He is the embodiment of God's justice, righteousness, and unconditional love. Our joy isn't diminished by the struggles we experience in life. Rather, because of Jesus, our joy burns brighter even in the darkest of valleys.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God's character and love. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word," (Heb. 1:3). The Babe in the manger on the early hours of Christmas morning was not – Jesus is not – just an ordinary human child. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the universe.

It is worth noting tonight, in an age when people are fixated on paranormal and supernatural experiences, that the writer of Hebrews emphasizes the superiority of Jesus over the angels. While angels announced His birth, Jesus Himself is the message. He is "the Heir of all things," and the One through whom God made all things. The joy we find in Him is not based on His birth alone, but on who He is – the eternal Son of God, unchanging and unshakable.

### **The Example of the Shepherds**

The joy of Christmas is multifaceted. It's the joy of an ancient promise fulfilled, the joy of a Savior being born, and the joy of knowing Jesus as the radiance of God's glory. The shepherds give us an example of how to live into this. First, they listened to the message. The words from the angel pierced their fear and filled them with hope. We must keep our hearts open to hear the Good News of Jesus.

Second, the shepherds responded. They went to Bethlehem, looking for Jesus. Their response required faith. Like those shepherds on the first Christmas night, we're called to take steps of faith – to look for Jesus in prayer, worship, and daily life. And that sometimes takes us out of our comfort zones. But when we draw near to Him, we find joy that only He can provide.

Finally, the shepherds shared their joy. They couldn't keep the news to themselves, even if they would've tried. They were bursting at the seams to tell someone, anyone who would listen. As they returned to their fields, the glorified and praised God, telling everyone around about what they had seen and heard. The joy we find in Christ is not meant to be hoarded. We're supposed to share it. When we share the Good News of Jesus, we multiply our joy and invite others to experience it as well.

### **Joy is Ours in Jesus Christ**

I know, with losing my dad this past spring, the holidays are hard. Some of you are experiencing that same feeling of loss tonight as well. We miss our loved ones who have gone home to Jesus sooner than what we would have liked. But the joy of Christmas is not an emotion. It's a transforming power. It changes how we see the world, how we face challenges, and how we live our lives. The joy comes from knowing that God IS with us – Emmanuel. It is a joy that goes through every trial because it is anchored in the unchanging truth of who Jesus is, what He's done for us, and what He continues to do even in this moment for us.

Isaiah reminds us that this joy is like a light in the darkness. Hebrews tells us that this joy is rooted in the eternal nature of Jesus Christ. And Luke shows us that this joy is for all people, breaking down barriers and inviting everyone to come and see the Savior.

As we celebrate Christmas, let's not lose sight of the joy that's ours in Jesus Christ. Let's listen to the message of the angels, respond with faith like the shepherds, and share this joy with the world. "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given," and His name is Jesus. This is Good News of great joy – joy that transforms, sustains, and lasts forever. Amen!

**Prayer:** Glorious God, Your splendor shines from a manger in Bethlehem, where the Light of the world is humbly born into the darkness of human night. Open our eyes to Christ's presence in the shadows of our world, so that we, like Him, may become beacons of Your justice, and defenders of all for whom there is no room. Amen.