

Week of December 25, 2011

Rejoice in God's Gift

Passage Outline:

1. **Rejoice in Hearing** (Luke 2:8-14)
2. **Rejoice in Going** (Luke 2:15-18)
3. **Rejoice in Treasuring** (Luke 2:19-20)

What's This About:

We will study the real joy in the Christmas story.

How Will This Impact Your Life:

This study will help you experience the joy of hearing and telling the good news of Christ's birth.

1. Rejoice in Hearing - Luke 2:8-14

Luke 2:8-14

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

- A. Luke's account of the Christmas story is unique.
 - i. He alone recorded the actual birth event of Jesus (2:1-7).
 - ii. Luke also was the only Gospel writer to record the announcement of Jesus' birth to lowly shepherds.
 - iii. Luke's aim to show the good news was meant for all people.
- B. **In the same region** where Jesus was born, **shepherds were staying out in the fields** performing their normal duty of **keeping watch over their flocks at night**.
 - i. They were among the last people anyone would expect to receive news of the Messiah's birth.
 - ii. Even though they tended sheep that would be used in temple sacrifices, they were considered unclean, "outcasts" and "sinners by the Jews.
 - iii. The very first people to hear of God's gift were people on the lowest rung on the ladder of social status.
 - iv. We should rejoice that God made Christmas available to every person, not just a select few.
 - v. Christ-followers should never get tired of hearing the message of God's Son coming to earth!
- C. Sudden, **an angel of the Lord stood before them** and the shepherds were **terrified**.
 - i. God's glory represents His power and presence.
 - ii. No wonder the angelic appearance terrify lowly shepherds.

How would you react if God or one of His Angels appeared to you?

If we were in the same position as the shepherds, we would experience the same shock and terror as they did. But their fear was not over the message of Christ's birth, but rather the angel's surprise visit. We, too, should not be troubled at all by the news of Jesus' birth. That should thrill us! This news of God coming into the world would culminate in our sins being paid for by Jesus on the cross. Our joy should be at its fullest during the Christmas season. Years after the biblical event, I wonder if these same shepherds laughed as they recalled their terror-filled response to the angel's appearance.

- D. Noticing their fear, the angel said, **“Don't be afraid.”**
- E. God's messenger was not bringing a word of judgment, disaster, or misfortune, but **“good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”**
- F. The message of the **good news** centered on the birth of Jesus, which the Angel summarized in the use of three titles:
- i. The infant Jesus was the **Savior**, He would be the ultimate deliver of all people placing explicit faith in Him.
 - ii. He was God's **Messiah**. The word literally meant “anointed one.” As the Father's “Christ,” Jesus, even as a newborn baby, was the anointed King whom God's people had long awaited.
 - iii. Perhaps most-striking, the child was **Lord**. He was the God-sent, divine King and Ruler of the universe, Who was deserving of worship and single-minded allegiance.
- G. In addition, the angel gave a three-fold **sign** that would help the shepherds find this specific baby:
- i. New born Babe: This would be a freshly born baby.
 - ii. Swaddling Cloth: was made from ripping fabric into 2 or 3 inch strips and then tightly wrapping the baby with legs up over his abdomen.
 - iii. Lying in a manger: this was the most unusual part of the sign.
- H. The single angel was joined by a host of heaven's angels **praising God** and saying **“Glory to God in the highest heaven,”** and as the King James Version says “on earth peace, good will toward men.”
- i. A better translation would read, “on earth peace among men well pleasing to God.”
 - ii. Jesus has made peace with God on our behalf, and as a result we appear well pleasing to God.
 - iii. People who please God are those who will respond to Jesus in repentance and faith. This is great news!

Can Christmas Joy last the whole year?

Many will celebrate Christmas without giving rightful attention to the One who should be the focus of the holiday. The saying is true: **Jesus is the reason for the season.** Amidst the family celebrations, parties with friends, and other seasonal festivities, how can we make sure our focus is on the heart of the Christmas message? Our joy during this Christmas should be found in story of the Christ-child before anything and everything else.

Check the box beside the response that best describes your reaction to hearing or studying Jesus' birth again this year.

Not this again!

“Ho-hum?”

I love this passage!

2. Rejoice in Going - Luke 2:15-18

Luke 2:15-18

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." ¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

A. The shepherds' actions were three-fold:

- i. The shepherds determined to **go straight to Bethlehem** because they believed this message did not only come from an angel but **“which the Lord has made known to us.”** Likewise we should be no less motivated to take this Christmas word to others.
- ii. They wasted no time, but **found both Mary and Joseph** and the babe exactly as the angel described him, **lying in the feeding trough.**
- iii. As exciting as their personal encounter with Him was, the shepherds did not stop there. Instead, **they spread the word concerning this child.** Their encounter with the Christmas message changed their lives.

B. What will you do with the Christmas Story?

“Happy Holidays” or “Merry Christmas”

Believers are often encouraged to take the good news of Jesus to others. Yet we feel nervous and even intimidated in our current culture to share this news freely. Even during the Christmas season, pressure mounts to greet others not with a heartfelt “Merry Christmas,” but a toned-down “Happy Holidays.” Here are two thoughts that will help:

- 1) Just as the shepherds shared the message of Jesus’ birth from their own experience, we should do the same. If Christ has truly changed our lives, we should be more than willing to joyfully tell others about it.
- 2) Our job as Christians is not to change the hearts of others. We are simply to tell the gospel and trust the Holy Spirit to draw people to Himself.

3. Rejoice in Treasuring - Luke 2:18-20

Luke 2:18-20

¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

- A. But **Mary treasured** up all these thing. Do you have special treasures, keepsakes and mementos of special events (my two-hit baseball from college days)?
- B. Mary did more than just collect treasures; she **pondered them in her heart**. To ponder means to think deeply about something, or to consider what things really mean? Mary was still learning about her Son and would throughout her life, right up to the day when she would stand before His cross.
- C. What do you ponder about?

Biblical Truths from our Study

1. The Biblical message is more often received by ordinary people, rather than the shakers and movers of the world. Why do you think that is true? And, aren’t you glad it is true?
2. We don’t have to be afraid of sharing the difference Jesus has made in our lives, because no one can really question what we have experienced.
3. Take time to ponder the meaning of life, what is truly significant and worthwhile to full living.