



How Do You Show Your Joy to the World?

Psalm 32:11: (NASB) *Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.*



We all know the often-quoted Scripture (Luke 2:10) that highlights Jesus' birth, *Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* This announcement is stirring for many reasons, not the least of which is the comprehensiveness of its scope. It is a message to ALL people, and further, it is a message of joy to all people! With all of the

wonderful lessons and characters that surround this proclamation, it is easy to lose sight of the simple presence of joy - great joy. It is easy for us to confuse joy with happiness, but they are not the same. So, what does it mean to live joyfully? How did those involved in the story of Jesus' birth find their joy? How do you live yours?

Joy is an attitude...not a feeling or an emotion. Feeling joy is completely different than feeling happy. – Vicki, CQ Team

We will begin our journey of joy with the shepherds, for they were perhaps the most unlikely chosen ones in this entire story. In many ways, shepherds were invisible, for they lived lives of relative solitude away from the daily commerce of the cities as they cared for their precious sheep.



The Shepherds' theme:

Finding joy in the REVEALING of a holy promise.

Psalms 67:1-4: (NASB) ¹God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us - Selah. ²That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. ³Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. ⁴Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. Selah.

We have not seen this yet. Can you imagine when the nations will be glad and sing for joy? This is the promise the angels brought the shepherds.

Luke 2:7-8: (KJV) ⁷And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. ⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Abiding in the fields - that is where they lived, meaning they would be the last to hear the news of the day.



- *It was a night like any other night except for that angel. Ain't seen nothing like it before or since. Us shepherds, we don't get a lot of excitement out there in the pasture, but that angel, it was so bright, so beautiful. I know what you're thinking, you're thinking, "Sam, you've been out in that pasture maybe a little bit too long." And you'd be correct, but that all changed when that angel came right up to us. And the angel said, "Don't be afraid." And I was like, "Too late." And then the angel said, no, I wrote it down. I've got to get this right. The angel said...milk, bread... no, that's my grocery list. Then the angel said, "I have good news of a great joy that shall be for all the people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."*

In this case, the fulfillment of prophecy required an angelic announcement to the most humble audience of shepherds. This was fitting. The baby Jesus would grow to assume the throne of David, once a shepherd himself. Imagine the fear, thrill and hope instilled in those shepherds! In the still of the night, under the vast expanse of the star-lit heavens comes this glowing message - full of light, full of prophecy fulfilled and full of expectation.

¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.



Glory to God in the highest
and peace on earth
goodwill towards men

Back to the shepherds...



- *And then the angel said, “He’s lying in a manger wrapped in cloth. Go find him.” Okey dokey! So, we’re all sitting around and then one of the shepherds, I think it was Steve, was like, “Hey what are we doing? Let’s get out of here - let’s go to Bethlehem!” So, we high tail it out of there, and we found that beautiful baby. I’ll tell ya, I was a different man after that. God chose me. Nobody’s ever chosen me for anything. I’ll never forget what that angel said, though. The angel said, “I bring good news to all people.” That means you, too.*



Luke 2:15-16: (NASB) ¹⁵When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us. ¹⁶So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as he lay in the manger.

These shepherds knew they were part of something big. They acted in faith, and they acted right away and found Mary and Joseph. The baby lay quietly in a manger, a feeding trough. Think of the tranquility and peace of the moment as they cast their eyes on their future Savior. They were lowly shepherds and this was Jesus - the one who would save the world!

Luke 2:17-18: (NASB) ¹⁷When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

To go and see him was one thing - to take this miracle and publish it amongst the people - that was another! Even though they were just shepherds, they were emboldened to speak out about the stunning event and the miraculous announcement they had been a part of. They stepped out of their comfort zone because the message was bigger than all of them.

Luke 2:19-20: (NASB) ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Those shepherds went back to their flocks, but we do not think they went back to their lives. How could they? The joy of their experience and the message would have changed them.

The Shepherds' theme:



Finding joy in the REVEALING of a holy promise.

- ✓ Requires humility to be in a position to even receive the message.
- ✓ Requires action to do something with the message.
- ✓ Requires stability to keep the message with you even after the initial excitement is ended.

They were worthy messengers!



We are so privileged to have the Bible and to see so many of God's promises already revealed with more to come.

Does our joy in the revealed will of God show?

Do we walk as one who has seen a great light?



The shepherds' example of joy is inspiring, but what about Joseph and Mary? What provoked their joy?

For Mary and Joseph, their joy came from many sources but let's focus on one. How does one respond to that which is impossible? What they were asked to experience was unreasonable at least from a human standpoint. So, what do you do when you are tasked with such odds? You respond.

(Source: Observations on "joy" from <https://www.psychologies.co.uk/joy-vs-happiness>) Joy and happiness are wonderful feelings to experience but are very different. Joy is more consistent and is cultivated internally. It comes when you make peace with who you are, why you are and how you are, whereas happiness tends to be externally triggered and is based on other people, things, places, thoughts and events.

The joy of Mary and Joseph was cultivated from the inside out. They responded to things deeper than just emotion.



Psalms 5:11-12: (NASB) ¹¹But let all who take refuge in You be glad, let them ever sing for joy; and may You shelter them, that those who love Your name may exult in You. ¹²For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield.

The good news here is that when we respond to the hardest challenges we are promised protection.

For the young woman Mary, the events unfolding around her were world changing.

The angel Gabriel had recently appeared to Zacharias to announce the coming birth of John the Baptist:

Luke 1:26-37: (NASB) ²⁶Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city...called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And coming in, he said to her, Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. ²⁹But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.

Gabriel's greeting was one of great favor, yet Mary's reaction was understandably confused and fearful.

The angel continued:

³⁰Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him





the throne of his father David; ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end.

Questions would have begun to swirl in Mary's head, as this message he spoke was unexpected, unlikely and unbelievable! Have a son and he will be "great"? He will be called the son of the MOST HIGH? And how is it that he will be a king - there were no kings under their harsh Roman rule - and not only a king, but a king with an everlasting reign? His kingdom will have NO END? How is this even sensible, let alone possible?

One question needed answering above all else:

³⁴*Mary said to the angel, How can this be, since I am a virgin?*

Faith could perceive of these other things, but this one question could not be fathomed.

Gabriel answered:

³⁵*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy child shall be called the Son of God. ³⁶And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.*

Finding joy in our response to the daunting challenges of life often comes down to one or more pivotal moments. For Mary, the answer to the impossible question was a plain and unflinching proclamation from a messenger of God himself.

Mary now had what she needed:

Luke 1:38: (NASB) *And Mary said, Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.*

Mary's joy as reflected in her response to a world-changing dilemma was to listen, clarify and to absorb. Her conclusion was to submit fully to the will of God. Mary's joy was on many levels. She took all things to heart. She, upon visiting Elizabeth in Luke 1:46-56, expounded her awe of God's providence.



"Silent Night," (Verse one) 4-year-old Claire Ryan

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
'Round yon virgin Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace

The immediate joy of responding to this great dilemma would be tested immediately. What would she say to Joseph when they next saw each other? "Hello my dear, how have you been these past few days?" "Fine, how are you?" "Um, an angel named Gabriel told me I would be pregnant, but it's all good!"

For Joseph, this would have been a unique and fearful problem, for Mary's explanation, though sincere, was just beyond believable. What should he do?



Matthew 1:18-25: (NASB) *¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.*

Joseph responded to his great dilemma with compassion and concluded that he should shield Mary from public disgrace. Though heartbroken, his care for her was evident.

²⁰But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son; and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. ²²Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which translated means, God with us.

God saw fit to give Joseph a lengthy and detailed explanation of what was happening, because the depth of the problem required a confidence just as deep so he could stand up and do exactly the right thing.

²⁴And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife.

Joseph awoke with a start and thought a moment. This was NOT some far-fetched explanation at all; rather, it was a fulfillment of prophecy. And not just any prophecy, but THE prophecy of THE Messiah that generations of Jews had looked forward to! "Mary, my espoused, was carrying the savior of all and I, Joseph, would have the opportunity and privilege to raise him to manhood. Glory to God!"

²⁵but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son; and he called his name Jesus.

This last detail shows Joseph's reverence for God and for his new wife. He was chosen to be as a dad to the Messiah. His naming the child in accordance with the angel's instruction verifies his complete acquiescence to what was once a life-altering dilemma.

 **Tommy, *The Skinny on Christmas*, skitguys.com**

- *So, true story: Christmas 2001, my son Hudson was recruited to play the baby Jesus in the Christmas program. I was sitting in the front pew. Everything's great, I mean, just fine. Then this teenage girl comes out playing Mary, and she's holding my son. And it just hit me, right? That's what God did. He put His son in the arms of a teenage girl, knowing full well that His son would eventually end up on a cross. I just, I wept, I couldn't even talk. I realized that if it were up to me, mankind would be out of luck, because I don't, I won't ever love anyone enough to give up my only son. Thank God He did.*

Joseph's joy in response to his life-altering dilemma: The only history we have of Joseph is his obedience to the angelic interventions that took place before Jesus was born, in his early years and when Jesus was 12. We conclude his joy was in obedience and responsibility, for Joseph was directly responsible for the welfare of the boy Jesus. Joseph was the one man chosen to be as a father and protect the boy. He must have been a special man to have this privilege!



Proverbs 23:24: (KJV) *The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him.*

- ✓ Requires honesty to realize just how overwhelming the dilemma is.
- ✓ Requires trust as a byproduct of faith to firmly grab hold of that which will guide us through. Trust makes faith deeply personal.
- ✓ Requires courage to see it through, as the initial challenges are only the beginning.

Mary and Joseph's
theme:



**Finding joy in
RESPONDING
to the most daunting
challenges.**

**Joy can come from a revealing and by way of our response.
How else do we find it?**

Sometimes great joy can come from our own effort towards recognition. This means looking *behind* us and recognizing the plan of God HAS unfolded, looking *around* us and recognizing the plan of God IS unfolding, and looking *before* us to anticipate the plan of God CONTINUING to unfold. We need to be on our toes!



Our next example of joy was ready:

Luke 2:21-24: (NASB) ²¹And when eight days had passed, before his circumcision, his name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. ²²And when the days for their purification...were completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord...²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord...

This reminds us that Mary, Joseph and Jesus are given no special entitlement or dispensation; they are simply given opportunity to show their faith in God and obedience to His Law.

Luke 2:25: (NASB) *And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.*

This is the only time Simeon is mentioned in the Bible.

(Source: Bible commentary by Albert Barnes) Nothing is certainly known of him but what is here related. He was an aged man, of distinguished piety and reputation, and was anxiously expecting the coming of the Messiah. Such an old age is peculiarly honorable. No spectacle is more sublime than an old man of piety and high character looking for the appearing of the Lord, and patiently waiting for the time to come when he may be blessed with the sight of his Redeemer.



Simeon's theme:



**Finding joy
in the RECOGNITION
of God's providence
and plan.**

Luke 2:26-35: (NASB) ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Here was a man who had NOT forgotten hope, who had NOT allowed doubt or fear to rule his heart. Rather, he lived in anticipation and expectation of God's gift. Who knows how long he waited...?

²⁷And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for him the custom of the Law, ²⁸then he took him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, ²⁹Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word.

Being aged, the most important thing Simeon looked forward to in his life was a glimpse, just a glimpse, of God's gift of redemption. He sees the baby, takes him in his arms and knows that his life is now complete, because in his arms he held the hope of the world! Nine months earlier Mary referred to herself as *God's bondservant*, as well. She at the beginning of her service and Simeon was at the end of his.

³⁰For my eyes have seen Your salvation, ³¹which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²A Light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel. ³³And his father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about him.

Simeon recognized the full import of redemption - *I have seen your salvation with my own eyes*. He acknowledged that Jesus was a light reaching even to all Gentiles, a light that is the glory of Israel. This light is now just a baby, but this baby is the hope of the world.

³⁴And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed ³⁵and a sword will pierce even your own soul - to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

Why talk about great sorrow when you are celebrating the greatness of a life unfolding before you? Simeon knew that with any great accomplishment comes great sacrifice...sometimes heart-breaking sacrifice.



- ✓ Requires patience - what we seek to identify does not simply appear because we want it to.
- ✓ Requires discipline - to be willing to stand at the ready for long periods of quietness.
- ✓ Requires faith - the surety that God will deliver what He has promised.

Simeon's theme:



**Finding joy
in the RECOGNITION
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For our joy to be full and to shine out, we need the humility of the shepherds, the courage of Mary and Joseph and the patience of Simeon. This is not necessarily easy in the context of our world and its appearance-based judgments. Today we say, "Christmas needs to look perfect to be perfect." Let's think about that again. This next little story is especially for the "Martha" types who are listening.

(Source: "If" by Sharon Jaynes©)

If I decorate my house perfectly with lovely plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights, and shiny glass balls, but do not show love to my family - I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals, and arranging a beautifully adorned table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family - I'm just another cook.

If I work at the soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home, and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family - it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir's cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to hug the child.

Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband.

Love is kind, though harried and tired.

Love doesn't envy another home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of your way.

Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.

Love never fails. Video games will break; pearl necklaces will be lost; golf clubs will rust. But giving the gift of love will endure.

We live in a time of great selfishness and wanting to have what everyone else has. Today we brag on social media, comparing our Christmas with others'. How do we compare the content of someone's heart? Our Christmas joy in the midst of all of this "stuff" needs to come back to what Simeon focused on.



Simeon waited his whole life to just hold the baby and proclaim who the baby was. All of that waiting was for an experience lasting just a few minutes. The meaning of joy and Christmas is the recognition of who Jesus is.

The Bible contains chapters about the preparation for the birth of Jesus, the actual birth and what happened after. There is much detail for us to study and meditate upon.

Let's take a moment and observe some wonderful symbolism in the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. John was born to Elizabeth and Zacharias, who were thoroughly faithful to the Law of Moses and were long past their child bearing years. Because John the Baptist was the last prophet of the Old Testament we can easily see how readily the conditions of his birth to aged parents help tell this story. According to John, the old Law would now be identified as the way to find Jesus. On the other hand Mary, a young, vibrant woman who had never been with a man was chosen to be the mother of Jesus, who "is" the *good news of great joy to all people*. So, on one hand we have the final words of the Old Testament represented in John and the other we have the first words and teachings of the New Testament and life coming through Jesus. That is the joy of Christmas!

This is what we need to focus on and think about during this Christmas season. Find the joy of what it all really means, regardless of our trials and difficulties. Embrace the savior of the world like Simeon for a few moments.

There are the humble shepherds, the courageous Joseph and Mary and the patient Simeon. Who is next?

Traditional depictions of the nativity scene show the three wise men who gave gifts (the Bible does not actually say how many wise men there were, just that three of them gave gifts) there in the stable with Joseph, Mary, Jesus and the animals. Actually, they came around to Bethlehem much later, and found Jesus and his family in a house, Matthew 2:11. It was there they worshipped him and gave him gifts.

The Wise Men's theme:



Finding joy in REACHING out with RESOLVE across nations to pay respects to the future King of all humanity.

First, who were these "wise men"?

(Source: Bible commentary by Albert Barnes) The original word here is *magoi* from which comes our word magician, now used in a bad sense but not so in the original. The persons here denoted were philosophers, priests or astronomers. They dwelt chiefly in Persia and Arabia. They were the learned men of the eastern nations, devoted to astronomy, to religion and to medicine. They were held in high esteem by the Persian court, were admitted as counsellors, and followed the camps in war to give advice. It is unknown whether they came from Persia or Arabia. Both countries might be denoted by the word "east," that is, east from Judea.



Matthew 2:1: (NASB) *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying...*

Already we see a resolve and strength of character that would be entirely foreign today. They traveled hundreds of miles for one purpose.

Matthew 2:2-12: (NASB) *²Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and have come to worship him. ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They said to him, in Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: (here they quote Micah 5:2)*

Added to their resolve was a deep reverence for God's plan. They came all that way not really knowing where they were to go, which showed their faith and determination. They knew they would somehow figure it out. A curious side note: the shepherds of Bethlehem knew more of the events of Jesus' birth than the religious leaders of the time. The leaders knew the prophecy, but there is no indication they knew he was already born.

⁷Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the child; and when you have found him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship him. ⁹After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the child was.

Obviously they did not know the politics of that place and time and proceeded to think everyone would want to reverence Jesus as they had set out to do. Their hearts were pure and their minds were set.

¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹After coming into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.



The gifts of the three wise men were significant, as they represented something:

- **Gold:** May represent obedience and consecration.
- **Frankincense:** May represent praise, devotion, heart adoration, appreciation and gratitude.
- **Myrrh:** May represented submission, a willingness for service, to the extent of bitterness and suffering.

These three gifts show us the life Jesus was going to live.

¹²And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

The blessing of God was upon them as they were directed away from Herod for their own safety - and especially for Jesus' safety. Think of the overwhelming



joy they would have had on their return journey, rehearsing God's providence in their minds and speaking of the tender child they traveled so far to honor.

- ✓ Requires foresight, because traveling hundreds of miles out of your own land is no easy task.

The Wise Men's theme:



Finding joy in **REACHING** out with **RESOLVE** across nations to pay respects to the future King of all humanity.

- ✓ Requires tenacity, because accomplishing such a mission means unrelenting effort.
- ✓ Requires reverence to risk life and limb to worship, praise and give gifts.

One last detail:

Matthew 2:13: (NASB) ¹³Now when they (the magi) had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Get up! Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.

The coming of the magi brought honor...and a tip-off to Herod (who would have eventually found out about Jesus). The beauty of this is their gifts would have adequately funded the escape and hiding of Jesus' family in Egypt. Joseph and Mary had to travel about 100 miles to get to Egypt.

For us, the giving of gifts does not have to be quite so dramatic. We can give with subtlety and with kindness everyday of our lives. There is no greater joy than that which is derived from bringing light or peace or aid into the lives of those in need.

The Red Marbles (Author Unknown)

I was at the corner grocery store buying some early potatoes. I noticed a small boy, delicate of bone and feature, ragged but clean, hungrily appraising a basket of freshly picked green peas. I paid for my potatoes but was also drawn to the display of fresh green peas. I am a pushover for creamed peas and new potatoes. Pondering the peas, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation between Mr. Miller (the store owner) and the ragged boy next to me:

"Hello, Barry, how are you today?"

"H'lo, Mr. Miller. Fine, thank ya. Jus' admirin' them peas. They sure look good."

"They are good, Barry. How's your Ma?"

"Fine. Gittin' stronger alla' time."

"Good. Anything I can help you with?"

"No, Sir. Jus' admirin' them peas."

"Would you like to take some home?" asked Mr. Miller.

"No, Sir. Got nuthin' to pay for 'em with."

"Well, what have you to trade me for some of those peas?"

"All I got's my prize marble here."

"Is that right? Let me see it," said Miller.

"Here 'tis. She's a dandy."

"I can see that. Hmmm, only thing is this one is blue, and I sort of go for red. Do you have a red one like this at home?" the store owner asked.

"Not 'zackley but almost."



"Tell you what. Take this sack of peas home with you, and next trip this way let me look at that red marble," Mr. Miller told the boy.
"Sure will. Thanks Mr. Miller."

Mrs. Miller, who had been standing nearby, came over to help me. With a smile she said, "There are two other boys like him in our community, all three are in very poor circumstances. Jim just loves to bargain with them for peas, apples, tomatoes or whatever. When they come back with their red marbles, and they always do, he decides he doesn't like red after all, and he sends them home with a bag of produce for a green marble or an orange one when they come on their next trip to the store."



I left the store smiling to myself, impressed with this man. A short time later I moved to Colorado, but I never forgot the story of this man, the boys and their bartering for marbles. Several years went by, each more rapid than the previous one. Just recently I had occasion to visit some old friends in that Idaho community, and while I was there I learned that Mr. Miller had died. They were having his visitation that evening and knowing my friends wanted to go, I agreed to accompany them. Upon arrival at the mortuary we fell into line to meet the relatives of the deceased and to offer whatever words of comfort we could.

Ahead of us in line were three young men. One was in an army uniform and the other two wore nice haircuts, dark suits and white shirts...all very professional looking. They approached Mrs. Miller, standing composed and smiling by her husband's casket. Each of the young men hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, spoke briefly with her and moved on to the casket. Her misty light blue eyes followed them as, one by one, each young man stopped briefly and placed his own warm hand over the cold pale hand in the casket. Each left the mortuary awkwardly wiping his eyes.

Our turn came to meet Mrs. Miller. I told her who I was and reminded her of the story from those many years ago and what she had told me about her husband's bartering for marbles. With her eyes glistening, she took my hand and led me to the casket. "Those three young men who just left were the boys I told you about. They just told me how they appreciated the things Jim 'traded' them. Now, at last, when Jim could not change his mind about color or size they came to pay their debt. "We've never had a great deal of the wealth of this world," she confided, "but right now, Jim would consider himself the richest man in Idaho." With loving gentleness she lifted the lifeless fingers of her deceased husband. Resting underneath were three exquisitely shined red marbles.

This reminds us of the joy of life. Mr. Miller gave quietly. What is our joy? How do we show our joy to those around us?

Paul's parting words to the brotherhood at Ephesus:

Acts 20:32-35: (NASB) ³²And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵In everything I showed you



that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

The story of Mr. Miller reflects the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul left the brotherhood at Ephesus with an emotional parting. He reminded them of Jesus' words, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. The church at Ephesus was to replace the loss of Paul with the grace of giving.

When we look at our lives and experiences, the joy we find in Christmas is a sense of being able to give from the heart. We have received great blessings and in turn it must pass through us to others.

The wise men probably spent months of their lives on a journey so they could bow down, worship the king and go home. What a wonderful example of joy expressed by those who felt what they did was that important.

**Now that we have the wise men and their example,
how do we show OUR joy to the world?**

As we think about the incredible gift that Jesus was and is to us, and as we think about the joy of those who surrounded his arrival as a baby, we really need to walk away with something concrete regarding our own joy. It should be real. It should be developed, and it should be observed. We need to focus on putting these things in place.

Ways we can find joy:

- ✓ Requires humility to be in a position to even receive the message.
- ✓ Requires action to do something with the message.
- ✓ Requires stability to keep the message with you even after the initial excitement is ended.

The Shepherds' theme:



Finding joy in the REVEALING of a holy promise.

**Mary and Joseph's
theme:**



**Finding joy in
RESPONDING
to the most daunting
challenges.**

- ✓ Requires honesty to realize just how overwhelmed the dilemma is.
- ✓ Requires trust as a byproduct of faith to firmly grab hold of that which will guide us through.
- ✓ Requires courage to see it through as the initial challenges are only the beginning.



Simeon's theme:



**Finding joy
in the RECOGNITION
of God's providence
and plan.**

- ✓ Requires patience - what we seek to identify does not simply appear because we want it to.
- ✓ Requires discipline - to be willing to stand at the ready for long periods of quietness.
- ✓ Requires faith - the surety that God will deliver what He has promised.

The Wise Men's theme:



**Finding joy in REACHING out with RESOLVE
across nations to pay respects
to the future King of all humanity.**

- ✓ Requires foresight, for traveling hundreds of miles out of your own land is no easy task.
- ✓ Requires tenacity, for accomplishing such a mission means unrelenting effort.
- ✓ Requires reverence to risk life and limb so you can worship, praise and give gifts.

Jesus' theme:



**Finding joy
in honoring
his Father!**

Jesus had a race to run. We have a race to run as we strive to walk in his footsteps:

Hebrews 12:1-3: (NASB) *¹Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...*

Our race is not easy and requires our full attention.

Our joy is founded in being invited to run.

Once we position ourselves to run, we now need to focus on Jesus:

²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Our joy is driven by Jesus' real life example.

He did what he did for ALL of humanity. During our everyday, we need constant reminders of what Jesus did for us:

³For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.



Our joy is fed by the power of Jesus overcoming the world.

Rehearsing this is vital to our joyful lives. Jesus showed us how to find and nurture his joy in OUR lives:

John 15:7-11: (NASB) ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love; just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

Jesus talked a lot about joy the night before he was crucified. *Abide in my love* to find joy. This is a recipe for a successful Christian life! Joy is not an emotion; it is a state of mind. We can have joy while suffering through trials, in pain or when life seems to be falling apart, just like Jesus.

No matter what the state of our own imperfections, we can always take another step towards Jesus' joy in our lives. The key is fruit-bearing and staying close to what Jesus taught us.

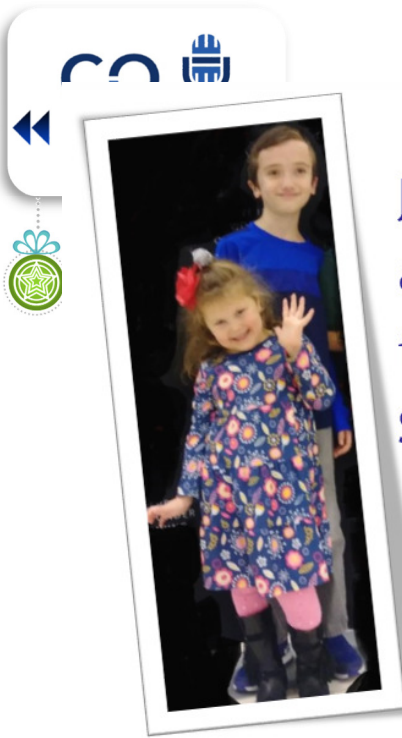
 **The gift, *Out of the Mouths of Babes, Estera's Testimony***

- *My 11-year-old son Jonathan loves building with Legos. He has a passion for building things that mean something to him. Last Christmas, he wanted to build the nativity scene himself. He did a beautiful job for his age. It had everything, including little baby Jesus and even the gifts that the Magi had brought for him.*

One day, little Sarah, who had just turned four, came to visit. Generally, they have a great time together as Jonathan is becoming more and more understanding with little ones. However, he's still a bit uneasy when kids that are visiting take the liberty of moving some of his toys around. You see, he's an only child, accustomed to finding his things where he had left them.

I was congratulating myself for a good day with the two kids (Sarah's mother was at work) when I heard the dreaded call: "Mom, Mom, come here fast!" I went as fast as I could, knowing that Jonathan could get very frustrated at times, especially if his projects get ruined.

I found both kids in front of the nativity scene. Jonathan excitedly pointed to it and said loudly, "Mom, Mom, look what Sarah did! She took baby Jesus and put him into the gift box!" I sighed, getting ready to dive into a long explanation: "Jonathan, you know very well she is little, you need to understand..." But he interrupted me, "No, it's not that. I'm not mad...listen to what she said!"



**Jonathan
and his
friend
Sarah**

Then, he proceeded to tell me how he had found little Sarah closing the cover on the gift box after putting baby Jesus inside. So, he asked her gently, "Sarah, why did you take baby Jesus from the manger and put him into the gift box?" She looked up at him, a bit surprised at the question, and then declared with no hesitation, "Because he IS the gift!"

I gasped, not only relieved, but amazed at the two kids, while, without losing momentum, Jonathan continued just as animated, "I asked her for whom was the gift, and she answered promptly, 'For everyone, of course!'" What beautiful statements from the mouth of a 4-year-old! And what great judgment from Jonathan's part to call me over and share with me this moving interaction between them!

"Mom, Mom, do you see how beautiful her thinking is?" I heard Jonathan say next. "Do you realize that she understands he is THE gift?" I was speechless for a moment at the scene that was unfolding in front of me. And then, I felt my heart melting with joy. Firstly, seeing that little Sarah understood the meaning of Christmas more than many adults do, and

secondly, realizing that Jonathan appreciated just as much when others grasped the deep meaning of Jesus' sacrifice.

I stood there in awe, thinking of the many hours that we, as parents, spend on teaching our children the right things, while the entire time we wonder if our kids do learn something. And they do. Little Sarah was proof that she grasped the beautiful concept that is the base for the teaching of the Bible on Jesus' sacrifice as a ransom for all. How wonderful would it be if all, great and small, would understand and appreciate this beautiful lesson and full-heartedly celebrate, year after year, the true reason for the season!

We can pass onto our children the true joy of Christmas and what it really means. Knowing God's plan provokes our joy. Here is a real-life prophecy that has actually *already begun* to be fulfilled. Talk about a reason to have joy!

This first part of this prophecy is already in process:

Jeremiah 33:7-11: (NASB) ⁷*I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against me and by which they have transgressed against me.*

We have seen Israel restored!

This next part is yet to come, though if people would abandon their prejudices, they would be able to see parts of it right now:

⁹*It will be to me a name of joy, praise and glory before all the nations of the earth which will hear of all the good that I do for them, and they will fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it. ¹⁰Thus says the LORD, Yet again there will be heard in this place, of which you say, It is a waste, without man and without beast, that is, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast,*

Here is a joyful conclusion:

¹¹*the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for*



His lovingkindness is everlasting; and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first, says the LORD.

This is one of many prophecies telling us we have the ability to understand how God's plan unfolds and the wonderful, life-changing joy we can develop if we continue to grow, like those faithful individuals we talked about today.

Joy is a choice, of a state of mind. Choose the joy of Christ. Let it show. Let it be contagious, because we stand for something bigger. Let the joy of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus be your driving force.

If you carry joy in your heart, you can heal any moment. — Carlos Santana



***So, how do you show your joy in the world?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***



Join us next week for our podcast on December 30, 2018:
Ep. #1054: "Can You Ever Get Too Comfortable?"

