

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA**  
**CHRISTMAS JOY**

By  
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*Villa Rica 12/21/03*

Luke 2:8-18 (NASB) <sup>8</sup>In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; <sup>11</sup>for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>"This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

<sup>15</sup>When 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." <sup>16</sup>So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they had seen this, they made known the statement, which had been told them about this Child. <sup>18</sup>And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.

I would like to use verse 10 as a theme verse for this message, *And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

What is joy? Britannica says it is a lively emotion of happiness: gladness, anything that causes delight. It is the greatest three-letter word there is because it sums up what all people want in life. We spend most of our days trying to produce joy. We work hard so that we can enjoy the fruits of our labors. We seek people and places and things in order to find joy.

We find joy in doing for others, in giving gifts at Christmas. We think of Christmas as a time of joy because it is a time when we set aside the troubles of the world and our own lives and just try to enjoy our family and friends. There is that desire within us all to have joy. We sense that the deepest need of our souls is to experience joy.

But joy is what many people feel they have so little of. As we grow older we lose the excitement of childhood when every new experience is an adventure of fun and excitement. Laughter comes easily to children because they were born with a bubble inside of them that wants to be released. Christmas is fun for us because we see the wonder and joy on the faces of our children and somehow that recaptures our own childhood memories, our own bubble gets stirred again. We want to be freed from the cynicism and pessimism of this world, even if only for a little while. Christmas affords us that opportunity.

God created Adam full of joy. I believe Adam and Eve were incredibly happy in that garden. There was no sin, no death, no misery, no pain, and no troubles of any kind to mar their happiness. God told Job that when He created the earth that all the sons of God shouted for joy. The Psalmist declares, **"In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"** Psalm 16:11.

## **I. Sin Has Robbed Us Of Our Joy**

Our Larger Catechism says, "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever" It also says that the fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. (LC Ques. 1 & 23.)

Sin brings personal problems that sap joy and rob us of peace of mind. There are people struggling with guilt, with weighty problems, with personal situations that take away all joy in life. Right now there are millions of people who are trying to piece together their broken marriages, their broken homes and their broken hearts. They may be missing some of the pieces and therefore believe they can never get it back together again; and that makes their misery even more intense. They are about like Humpty Dumpty. You remember how that rhyme goes... "***Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. And all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again.***"

But we know that there is one whose name is Jesus who can pick up the broken pieces and make something new and even better.

But besides personal problems there are moral problems in our culture, in American society that obviate joy. We have violence in our streets and even in our schools and our homes. On top of that we have worldwide violence.

I have been following the news for many years and I cannot remember a time where there has not been a war raging someplace, and since 9/11/01 and the attack against us in New York and Washington, DC that took so many innocent lives we have been in a war against terrorism and we are told it may continue indefinitely.

Even as we look forward to a joyous Christmas holiday with our families, there are grieving families and suffering people that concern us all. We don't like to think that we are enjoying ourselves while others are homeless, hungry, cold and miserable. Just the knowledge of these things dampens our joy. We may find it hard to manifest joy.

A man wanted to perform some kind of Christian service, so his pastor suggested that he go to a rescue mission and help. The man duly presented himself to the superintendent of the mission shortly before a service for the down-and-outers who walked along Skid Row. The superintendent told the man to stand out on the sidewalk and invite passing men to come into the meeting. The man accosted the passersby and, in a mournful tone, asked them to enter the mission. Each man to whom he spoke glanced at him and went on. He learned his lesson, however, when one man responded to his doleful invitation, "Brother, wouldn't you like to come into the meeting?" Cynically, the man looked at his solemn face and said, "No, thanks; I've troubles enough of my own"

We certainly are not good recommendations for the Lord Jesus Christ if we have not learned the great truth that joy is one of the prime requisites of the Christian life. At least at Christmas we can put on a happy face.

For many people the joy of Christmas is merely a very brief interlude in an otherwise joyless life. They are on a materialistic treadmill. We live in a complex, materialistic, competitive world. We Americans are oriented to a materialistic philosophy that is really a killjoy philosophy.

Perhaps you have read the book by Dr. Maurice Rawlings called "*To Hell and Back*". In the book he tells of a man who had a near-death experience, who had by training and ambition sought success and money as his goals. But when catastrophe overtook him his goals changed radically. He asked Dr. Rawlings, "Do you know what you think about when your next breath may be your last? When you know you may not live another hour?" Dr. Rawlings said he did not answer his question. But the man named Fred told him anyway. "When your back is to the wall, the object of life is no longer money -- the object, surprisingly enough, is time. Immediately the question becomes not how much money do I have left, but how much time do I have left. What you will do with each precious moment you have left." To explain his predicament Fred quoted James 4:13-17: ***Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord will, we shall live and also do this or that."***

Fred survived his heart attack and is now a Presbyterian minister. His near death experience changed his American ambitious and materialistic outlook. Now he has joy in serving the Lord Jesus Christ with the precious time he has been extended. - Maurice S. Rawlings, M.D., "*To Hell and Back*", p. 235, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1993.

## II. Christ's Mission Was Not A Mission Of Joy

Let me say first that the mission of Jesus Christ was not a joyous mission. The cross was His mission. He was sent on a mission of mercy that required the laying down of His own life at the hands of sinners. As we read in Hebrews 10:5-7: "**SACRIFICE AND OFFERING THOU HAST NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY THOU HAST PREPARED FOR ME; IN WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES FOR SIN THOU HAST TAKEN NO PLEASURE. THEN SAID I, BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE ROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.**" And it goes on to tell us that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

This was not a pleasant or enjoyable thing. This was a horrible cup of pain and shame. He even prayed that if it were possible this cup might pass from Him, nevertheless, Thy will be done.

We are told in that same book of Hebrews that Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame because of the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). That anticipated joy was His pleasure in presenting to His Father those redeemed souls, which His mediatorial work would reconcile to God.

Isaiah spoke of this when he prophesied: *The Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.*

God's plan of redemption is to recover an elect seed from the fallen race -- men and women, boys and girls to enjoy the glories of heaven, to know the joy of the Lord. Adam brought both himself and all his posterity into an estate of sin and misery and death, but the Lord Jesus Christ, as our virgin-born and sinless Second Adam brings redemption to the earth. He founds a new race of justified men, and they are a people of joy.

There was no joy in the cross, but Jesus knew the accomplishment of His mission would bring joy to Himself and all who are saved by Him.

The angel of the Lord understood this and conveyed this truth to the shepherds that first Christmas in the long ago. **And the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."** Vs 10.

We are born into an eternal kingdom of joy. As Isaiah prophesied **"So the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion; and everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away...** and the Psalmist wrote, **Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let Thy godly ones sing for joy"** (Isa. 51:11; Psa. 132:9).

We are told that in heaven **He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away. And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new"** (Rev. 21:4).

## III. Our Joy Is Both Present And Anticipatory

We cannot say that the Christian life is all joy and without tribulation, for Christ Himself told us that in this world we would have tribulation, but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.

As Christians we do not shut our eyes to the fact that even though we have been born into the Kingdom of Heaven there is still much sin and misery in this world, and even in one's own life there is adversity and trial, sorrow and pain. We walk by faith and not by sight; and we recognize that we are still in

a world that is basically joyless because many are yet without Christ. The only true joy in this world is that which Christ brings to us, and that joy is intermittent, even though our salvation is not intermittent.

We see how this world is and we don't close our eyes to the sin and misery that abounds all about. Nor do we retire from the world and join a nunnery or a monastery. We are salt and light. We are to be involved. We take a stand for righteousness in a wicked and crooked generation. This may cause us to be persecuted and even hated. We do not imagine for a moment that at this time and place we are having a heavenly experience, that all pain and misery have been vanquished, that sin is no longer a problem. But we now live our lives with a new perspective. We do not see things with a jaundiced and mournful eye. There is hope! We are the people of hope, not of despair. Men have forsaken God but God has not forsaken men.

God is at work in the world. He is busy with a program of redemption. He is calling men and women, boys and girls to Himself. People are coming to Christ, and when they do they become new creatures in Christ with that new and brighter outlook. And there is joy! There is the joy that comes through divine righteousness freely given by Jesus Christ to cover our sin. For when a person comes to Jesus Christ there is joy in knowing that sins are forgiven and that the Holy Spirit has come in to cleanse and sanctify. This can be a source of daily joy. There is a fountain of joy from which every child of God can drink. And this well never runs dry. One of the fruits of the Spirit is joy.

There is also joy in fellowshiping with other believers. We belong to a body that loves and shares and cares. We can have that joy that comes through worship, knowing that the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion (Psa. 48:2).

We can also know the joy of sharing Jesus Christ with others. Jesus tells us that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. It is a privilege to minister the Gospel of Christ to others, so that they may enter upon the same life of peace and joy. This is a way for you and me to increase our joy.

Do you know the joy the angel of the Lord spoke of to the Shepherds in the long ago? Have you received Jesus Christ into your heart as your Savior and Lord? Are you following Him in a life of discipleship? Then you will surely taste of His joy!

### **Hymn is #211 “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”**

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