

Joy Before Christmas

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[0 : 00] We're in the Gospel of Luke this morning. The Gospel of Luke is written by Luke. In chapter 1 of Luke, he very carefully sets the stage for us with promises, with prophecies, with unexpected pregnancies.

And he does this so that we can see that the birth of Jesus isn't just some isolated miracle, but the birth of Jesus is actually the fulfillment of God's promises to us.

It's the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to us. And so our passage this morning sits right at the moment where God's hidden work becomes visible, where faith responds with joy in the world before the world has ever seen what God is about to do.

And so will you turn your eyes and ears and hearts with me this morning to Luke chapter 1, verse 39 to 56. Hear the word of the Lord.

At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

[1 : 41] And when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in a womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed, And Mary said, His mercy extends to those who fear Him from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with His arm. He has scattered those who are proud in the inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abram and his descendants forever, just as He has promised our ancestors.

And Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord remains forever.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for Your Word. Your Word is true and eternal. Your Word is quick and living.

[3 : 33] It's sharper than any two-edged sword. And Your Word judges the thoughts and the intentions of our heart. Your Word stands forever. And I pray that as we look to this passage that we are reading today and we seek to understand what it means, we pray that You give us ears to hear Your voice.

We pray, Father God, that You give us the grace to be able to apply these things to our lives. For the glory of Your name. Amen. I don't know if there are any avid hikers in the Union Chapel, but if you've ever gotten up like really, really early one morning, like probably like maybe three o'clock, four o'clock, and the night before you determine that you are going to summit Lion's Head and you want to get to the top of Lion's Head before the sun comes up, you'll know the feeling of getting to the top of a mountain when it is completely dark.

As you get to the top, the wind starts cutting through your jacket and hopefully when you do that early in the morning, you have a nice thick K-way puffer jacket on.

But when you get to the top, it's completely dark. And there might be one beautiful aspect to it that you'll get to see all of the lights from all of the buildings and the houses around the city that's burning brightly, but it's still dark.

It's dark, the city is quiet, and for the moment you wonder if it was worth your effort climbing the mountain in the dark.

[5 : 17] Now some people might say, I'm up here, I've seen all the lights, I'm just going to go down, go back home, go and take a nice hot bath, or maybe I'm first going to go and have a cold plunge and then have a hot shower and then have my morning coffee.

Some people will say, there's nothing else to see, I've seen it all now, I'm going to go back. But others will stay for a little while longer because they know that something is coming. And so they'll stay, they'll face east, and before the sun actually rises, something beautiful happens. As you look out to the east, you see a very, very faint horizon starting to emerge, colors of pink, colors of orange, colors of gold start to streak across the sky.

And if there are other people who were as keen as you to hike up the mountain in the dark, you'll start to hear the excitement, like there it is, and people will take out their phones, they'll start recording the sun coming up, people will have cameras, and there'll just be a sense of excitement on the top of the mountain.

Now friends, this is exactly what is happening in Luke 1 this morning. Mary and Elizabeth are standing in the darkness of a world that is still waiting for its Redeemer.

[6 : 48] In fact, Rome still rules, sin still reigns, and death still stings, and nothing has really changed outwardly. Jesus hasn't been born yet.

The sun hasn't risen yet. And yet when we read Luke chapter 1, what do we see? We see joy exploding off of the pages.

Why is that? Why is it when we read Mary's song that we see so much joy even before this little baby is born? We see that because God's promise has begun to dawn.

This is that faint little pink, orange, gold line on the horizon as the sun comes up. Salvation is on the way because the first light of God's redemption plan is now breaking through the darkness.

Advent is the season where God teaches us to rejoice and we rejoice way before His salvation actually appears or the fullness of His salvation appears.

[8 : 04] And we can do that. We can rejoice before the fullness of God's salvation appears because God's word is sure, because God's promises are true, and because God's mercy has already begun its work in Christ Jesus.

Now that's the joy that Mary sings about in her song, and that's the joy that God invites you and I into today. That's Luke's main argument that he's making in our text today, and it's this.

Because God has come to us in Christ, God's people can rejoice with a very deep, a very defiant joy, a joy that trusts in God's promises, a joy that welcomes God's great reversals, and a joy that rests in God's covenant faithfulness.

And we can do this even before the fullness of salvation arrives. And I want you to see this through three movements in our passage today.

The joy of faith, the joy of reversal, and the joy of fulfillment. The joy of faith, the joy of reversal, and the joy of fulfillment.

[9 : 20] Let's look at the first point, the joy of faith. When we turn to verse 39, we find Mary doing something remarkable.

Verse 39 says, In those days, Mary arose, and she went with haste. Mary arose, and she went with haste.

She, we, when we read Luke 1, we don't find a, a, a hesitant Mary. We don't find a Mary who is wanting to first sit, and, and, and, and stew in, in uncertainty.

We don't find a Mary who is waiting for more signs after the Lord had already sent an angel to announce the birth of the Savior of the world to her. We see a, a, a woman that rises up and moves with haste because she believes in the word that God has spoken to her.

Gabriel told Mary, nothing is impossible with God. And what does Mary do? She responds not with paralysis, not with uncertainty, but she responds with faith.

[10 : 39] And as she responds with faith, she, faith, she takes the next step. And as she, she, she, she hastefully goes to her cousin Elizabeth, and as she enters Elizabeth's home, Luke wants us to see something even more astonishing.

And it's actually that joy doesn't begin with, with Mary. It begins with a, with a child in Elizabeth's womb, according to our, our, our, our, our, our text.

We are told that, that as Elizabeth, as Mary greets Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps. John leaps with joy, and Elizabeth is filled with the spirit.

And, and what comes out of Elizabeth's mouth is, is, is blessings. Now remember, Jesus hasn't, Jesus hasn't been born yet. And so nothing outwardly has, has changed in, in the world.

Again, Rome is still occupying the land. There's still poverty that, that is crushing families. Mary is still, um, a very vulnerable, unmarried teenage, living under the shadow of, of, of social shame.

[11 : 52] And yet joy breaks out. Why? Joy breaks out because God, has spoken, and faith takes God at, his word.

Elizabeth puts a, a finger on the heart of it in, in verse 45. She says, blessed is she who believed, that there would be a fulfillment, of what was spoken to her, from the Lord.

And so the blessing doesn't come from, from Mary's status. The blessing doesn't come from, Mary's worthiness. It doesn't even come from her, her circumstances.

The blessing comes from the fact that, Mary believed, God's promise. And so faith, faith is really the, the, the, the grounds, or the soil, where joy at Christmas time, grows.

And this is, this is where, where the text presses, very gently, but also very firmly, on us. So often we, we can think that joy, will come to us, after God changes, our circumstances, after the stresses, of our, of our lives, are lifted away, after an answer, to unanswered prayer, comes after the suffering, that we are going through, ends.

[13 : 16] But Mary shows us, a, a, a very different way. Joy begins, not when life is easy, but joy begins, when we trust, that God is already, at work, even when we cannot see, the fullness, of his salvation.

Joy doesn't come, from our situations, but joy comes, from our savior. So friends, the, the, the joy of faith, is the joy, that says, Lord, if, if you have spoken, if you have given, the word, then it's as good, as done.

It is the, it is the joy, that takes that, that first glow, on the horizon, as proof, that the sun, is actually on its way. It's the joy, that, that rests, not on how we feel today, but it rests, on the certainty, that God keeps, his promises, for us.

And this is, Advent joy, this is Christmas joy. It is joy, that arrives, even before Christmas. It is joy, that, that, that, that is here, while the world, is still dark, while the sun, hasn't been, risen yet.

It's joy, because Christ Jesus, is already on, the way. This brings us, to our second point, the joy of, of reversal. As, as Mary responds, to, to Elizabeth's blessing, her first words, actually frames, everything that follows, after that.

[14 : 50] Mary's first, first words, are my, my soul, magnifies the Lord, and my spirit, rejoices, in God, my Savior. My soul, magnifies the Lord, and my spirit, rejoices, in God, my Savior.

Notice again, her joy, isn't grounded, in a situation, her joy, is grounded, in her, her Savior. And it is, this joy, that allows her, to see the world, as, as God, sees it.

Because, when, when God, who is near to us, he doesn't simply, comfort individuals, he actually comes, and he overturns, the world's, entire value system.

And Mary says, that he has, looked on the, humblest state, of his servant. In, in other words, God, sees, what the world, overlooks.

God, honors, those whom the world, dismisses. God, raises up, those who have, absolutely no, earthly power, those who have, no platform, no prestige, these are the people, whom God, lifts up.

[16 : 03] And, and Mary, a, a poor, teenage girl, from, an insignificant, village, and God, comes, and God, chooses, her, to be, the Messiah.

And, that is the reversal, that should bring joy, to us, today. It is, the, the upside down, kingdom of God, that is, is busy, breaking, breaking in, to the world.

Now, listen to the, the, the verbs, that, that fill Mary's song. Mary says, he has scattered the proud, he has brought down the mighty, he has exalted the humble, he has filled the hungry, he has sent the rich away, empty.

Every one of, of those is a, a reversal. It's a, divine overturning of, of human expectations, of, of human hierarchies, of human kingdoms.

And, and this isn't, like when you read, um, the, Mary's song, it isn't just, um, abstract poetry. This is actually, the pattern of God's salvation, for, us.

[17 : 15] When Jesus enters the world, he comes to, uplift the broken. He comes to uplift, the poor in spirit. He comes to uplift, those who are overlooked.

He comes to uplift, those who are, repentant. And Jesus comes, and he confronts, the proud. He confronts, the self-sufficient.

He confronts, the powerful, who trust, Christ in, themselves. Mary's song, isn't a, a sentimental, Christmas carol.

Mary's song, is a declaration, that God's kingdom, cuts against the grain, of, of every earthly, kingdom. And this is where, where joy comes in.

If, if God works this way, then there is hope, for every humble, man and woman. There is hope, for every hurting man, and woman. There is hope, for every struggling person, who clings, to Jesus. [18:15] If you come to God, with your empty hands, God fills them. If you come to God, in need, God satisfies you. If you come, acknowledging your weaknesses, Christ, will exalt you.

But if you come to God, with pride, if you come to God, with a certificate, that says, God I've done this, and I've, I've helped that one, and I'm at church, 52 Sundays, a year.

If you come to God, brimming with pride, if you believe, that you are enough, on your own, God, in love, will empty you, so that you might learn, to depend, on him.

And so, Mary's, Mary's joy, erupts, because she sees, what kind of God, is entering, the world. It's a God, who overturns justice. A God, who breaks the grip, of oppressive powers.

It's a God, who comes to defend, the weak. It's a God, who brings down, every throne, that sets itself, against him. And this is, Advent joy.

[19:24] It's the joy, that knows, the world as it is, will not be, the world as, it stays. Because Christ, has come, and the great reversal, has begun.

God is busy, remaking, and renewing, everything. Let's look at our, third and final point, the joy of, fulfillment. As, as Mary, brings a song, to its, to its climax, she, she lifts her eyes, beyond her own story, and even beyond, her own generation, and this is what she sings.

She says, he has helped, his servant, Israel. Remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and his offspring, forever.

In other words, Mary is saying, what God, promised hundreds, of years ago, he's fulfilling, right, now. This, this child, that she's carrying, in, in a womb, is not, simply, a miracle, but he's the living proof, that God, never forgets, his people.

God, never abandons, or forsakes, his plans. God will never, ever break, the word that he makes, to his people. And when Mary says, God remembers, his mercy, she doesn't, she doesn't mean, that God finally, recalled something, that he had forgotten.

[20:53] In scripture, when, when, when, writers, speak about God, remembering, it speaks about God, acting. It speaks about God, stepping in. It speaks about God, moving.

And so God is bringing, his promises, to, completion. And here, in this, in this very quiet, Judean home, through, through two, seemingly insignificant, and obscure women, God is bringing, the entire covenant story, to, its fulfillment.

Think of the weight, of what Mary is, is confessing. The, the promise to Abraham, that all nations, would be blessed.

The promise, of a son of David, would reign forever. The promise, through the prophets, of a, of a coming deliverer. All of it, is taking shape, in her womb.

The whole storyline, of redemption, from Genesis, to Malachi, is, is converging, in this moment.

What does Mary do? Mary rejoices.

[22:02] She rejoices, because she knows, that God is doing, what he said, he's going, to do. And this is where, Advent meets us, today.

Between, between, an ancient promise, and the coming, fulfillment. We, we live in, we live, after Christ's, first coming, but we live, before his, his second coming.

And, we hold in our hands, a, a Bible, that is full of promises, that God, has kept. And, if we, if we lift our eyes, to those promises, we know, that God will keep, the promises, that he, has made.

And so that means, that you and I, can, can rejoice. And that our rejoicing, when things don't, look great, it isn't us, just sitting in a corner, closing our eyes, crossing our fingers, hoping that everything, is going to be okay.

It's not, it's not wishful thinking. True joy, is, is, is resting, on the solid foundation, of God's, unbreakable, covenant faithfulness, to his people.

[23:14] Now, if, if God kept his, his promise, to, to send Christ, Christ in the world, God will certainly, keep every promise, that he's made, to his people, in, in Christ Jesus.

He's going to finish, the good work, that he started. He's going to, he's going to, bring his kingdom, into its fullness. He's going to, wipe away, every tear. He's going to return, for his own people.

And so, Mary teaches us, that to, to rejoice, because, the God, who made promises, to us, fulfills them. He keeps them. The, the, the dawn, is already broken.

The sunrise, that we long for, is guaranteed. And so, you and I, can have joy, before Christmas.

We, we can have, joy, before the fulfillment, of God's salvation.

We can have joy, before, we stand, on that last, and we see Jesus, face to face, when he's making, everything new. We can have that joy, because God's word, does not fail.

[24 : 20] We can have that joy, because God's mercies, endures, forever. Now friends, what is, what does this mean, for you and I today? What does this mean, for you today?

Or, let me, let me ask, you a different question. What fear, what longing, what hardship, what, what unanswered prayer, does your life, feel the ache, of the not yet, today?

And, and, and do you feel, that you are stuck, in the ache, of the not yet, today? Now let me, let me be, the first to admit, in this room, that life is hard, darkness, and pain, is real.

And so when we call you, to abandon those fears, and, and move forward in joy, it is not denying, and making light of, the hardship that you, may be experiencing.

We, we call you to abandon, that fear, and that, that, that hardship, and clinging on, to unanswered prayers, because, joy is, a certain, God's promises, and that being fulfilled, is a certainty, for, us.

[25 : 39] Let me ask you, another question. Is it, is it possible, that you might be stuck, in the, in the ache, of the not yet, because you've, mislocated, your joy?

Maybe, you assume, that, joy will only come, after God, changes your circumstances, after, your job stabilizes, after that, tough relationship heals, after grief passes, after anxiety, finally, lifts, scripture shows, the waiting for joy, after, scripture shows, that waiting for joy, after life, improves, is, is actually waiting, for something, that the world, can never consistently, give you.

If, if joy depends, on outcomes, then, then you and I, will always be anxious. We will always be, comparing our lives, to other people. We will always be, fearing that the little joy, that we have, can be taken, away, from us.

And is that, possibly why, that ache, of the not yet, remains? Because you've looked, to other places, for, that joy? Let me ask you, another question.

Is it possible, that you are, are stuck, in the ache, of the not yet, because you have, forgotten the character, of the God, who speaks? In this, space of the not yet, you, you find yourself, beginning to, to doubt.

[27 : 13] You ask, does God see me? When I pray, does God actually, listen to me? Is God actually, going to act? Has, has God, forgotten me?

you? And when you, forget who God is, your hearts, sink into the assumption, that, that nothing is, going to change. And what happens, is that ache, becomes, the lens, through which you, interpret everything, that is happening, around you.

Mary and Elizabeth, break into, joy before Jesus, is born. They break into, joy before Jesus, is born, because they trust, the one, who has spoken.

Now the ache, doesn't disappear, but it is no longer, the truest thing, about their lives. God's promises, for them, are.

Another question, is it possible, that you are, are stuck, in the ache, of not yet? Because you think, that you are the one, who has the power, to feel, joy.

[28 : 25] That you are the one, who has the power, to create that joy, for yourself. And so you try, to fix your hearts, by trying harder, trying to be positive, trying to be strong, trying to, to, to rise above, the circumstances.

But our text today, teaches us that, joy isn't something, that is self, produced. Joy is something, that you and I, stand with open hands for, and we, receive it.

Joy is the fruit, of someone else's work, not the fruit, of your work. That someone else, is Jesus Christ. He has come, and he stepped, directly into, your and my, not yet.

He has come, and he's, he's not just, stepped into, our not yet, but he has, has, has made, a decisive, already, for God's, salvation.

The son of God, he came, and he entered the world, the world was, was, full of, unfulfilled, longing, the world was, full of, unfinished stories, it was full of, unresolved pain, and Jesus came, and he took all of that, upon, himself.

[29 : 40] He became, the man of sorrows, so that sorrow, would never have to have, the final word, in your, and my, lives. Jesus, Jesus bore the curse, so that blessing, might flow, to the lowly, who cling, to him.

Jesus entered, our, our darkness, so that his light, would, would dawn, even before, the resurrection glory, that you and I, eagerly, await, for.

In his first coming, he, he gave us the cross, and he finished, the work of salvation, on the cross. In his first coming, he secured, our forgiveness.

In his first coming, he, he accomplished, our adoption, into God's family. He gave us, his spirit. He gave us the promise, that nothing, can separate us, from the love, of God.

In, in his second coming, Jesus gives us, the joy of what God, will surely do, in the future. God promised, that his promises, will be fulfilled. He, he promised us, that every tear, will be wiped away.

[30 : 53] He, he promised us, that the ache, of the not yet, will give way, to glory. He promised, that the ache, of the not yet, will become, now, and, forever.

And this is why, Mary and Elizabeth, can rejoice, in a world, that is still dark. Because Christ Jesus, has already come, and Christ, will surely come, again.

And that's good news, for us today. That's good news, for us today. Because the gospel, moves us, from a place, where we are aching, in the not yet, and it moves us, to a place, of joy, not necessarily, by changing, our circumstances, first, but by changing, our confidence, by anchoring, our hearts, in something, that is unshakable, unbreakable, and that is, the promises, of God.

And it's, the promises, of a God, who keeps, his word. So friends, because Jesus, has come, you and I today, we can, we can rejoice, even while, we are still waiting, for the fullness, of his salvation. Mary, Mary teaches us, that joy is not found, in perfect circumstances, but joy is trusting, in a God, who always keeps, his promises. And so as we, continue on, in this Advent season, and as we, move toward Christmas, I pray that, that this joy, will fill, your hearts, and your homes.

[32 : 30] That this, this, the joy of faith, the joy of, of seeing God, undoing things, the joy of, the unshakable, fulfillment of God's, covenant to us, that that will fill, your hearts, and your homes.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you, for this wonderful, wonderful promise, that promises, that we have, in, your word.

more than, the promises, that we have, written in the word, we thank you for, for who you are. A God who, keeps your word. A God who, keeps your promises.

And Father, we pray today, that you would help us, help us to, move out of the place, where we are stuck, in the ache of the knot yet, and help us to move, to a place, where we rejoice, not because, circumstances have changed, but we rejoice, because of the, unshakable, unbreakable promises, that we have, in your word.

So will you help us today? Will you help us today, to look to Jesus, whom the writer of Hebrews said, for the joy, that was set before him, he endured the cross.

[33 : 42] For the joy of, of, of, of having, your children, gathered together, Jesus endured, hardship. And so may that joy, strengthen us, and empower us today.

May it give us, the spiritual power today, to live, lives that's filled with joy. We thank you for your word, continue to speak to us we pray. Amen.