



## FINDING JOY

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For many of us the joy and anticipation of the season have become reduced to figuring out what we can afford to give to our loved ones.

We still enjoy the Christmas carols, Christmas movies, and Christmas goodies. But, when we are honest, in all the hassle of Christmas, we have lost our joy.

Stop for a little bit and consider what Christmas is really all about and remember that true joy comes from the baby of the manger.

Philippians 2:5-8(NIV) Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Two thousand years ago God chose to empty himself and become nothing so that we could become something.

One of our cherished ideas is that we can seek and find God. But, if you had known ahead of time that God was planning to visit our planet, where would you have expected to find Him?

Where would you have started looking for Him? Would you have thought about a baby? Would your first stop be in a barn or animal stall?

Would you have gone to a carpenter's shop to find the designer of the universe? If you are honest, wouldn't you have been looking for a powerful, awesome, even terrifying and unapproachable being?

Wouldn't you have expected someone gloriously arrayed in royal raiment, dangling jewels, and with an impressive jeweled crown on his head.

The fact is we cannot find the Savior on our own. God knows this, so He came to us. He showed up wearing a different kind of glory—the glory of humility.

The God who created the universe, and who, if He desires, can order armies and empires around like pawns, is approachable.

Luke 2:1-5(NIV) In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Our God who made himself nothing emerged in Bethlehem as a baby who could not speak or eat solid food. The God who created all things became dependent on a teenager for shelter, food and love.

Put yourself in Mary and Joseph's shoes: They appeared to be helpless pawns caught in the movement of secular history, yet every move was being made by the hand of God.

The Messiah had to be born in tiny, insignificant Bethlehem. As the Virgin traveled with her husband, Joseph, to the census city, she bore under her steady beating heart, hidden from view of the world, the thumping heart of God.

The baby that young Mary carried was not a Caesar—a man who claimed to be a god—but a far greater wonder—God who had become a man.

We know the Christmas story well—we have sanctified it and cleaned it up for our church pageants. But we find joy when we realize the normalness of how God came into the world.

When it was time for the birth, Joseph must have wept along with Mary. Overwhelmed by Mary's birth pains, the stinking barnyard, their poverty, the indifference of strangers to their plight, the humiliation, and the sense of helplessness.

As a husband, Joseph felt the shame of not being able to provide for young Mary on the night of her giving birth. He was also aware of his own inadequacy as a midwife. It would make a man either curse or cry.

When our Savior was born, there were cries of pain, and the messiness of birth. Joseph's trembling carpenter's hands, clumsy with fear and slippery from the blood and amniotic fluid, brought fourth God's Son.

The baby's limbs waved helplessly as He gasped the cold air and His first cry pierced the night. Neither they, nor we could have expected the humbleness and normalness of this night.

Luke completes the picture: Luke 2:7(NIV) ...she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

We have no idea how long Mary was in labor pains before the birth. We don't know how many times Joseph prayed, "God help us."

We don't know how he fretted and wiped her brow and spoke words of encouragement, then paced out to look into the night sky and back.

Finally Jesus was born and Joseph wiped Him clean as best he could, then lay Him on Mary's breast. Mary, after counting His fingers and toes, with Joseph's help, wrapped each of His little round arms and legs with strips of cloth. Then she laid Him in the manger.

I told the story in this way to remind us to never forget—this is where Christianity began. The Son of God came into the world not as a prince, but as a pauper. Even as the story continues we are reminded of the humbleness of it.

Luke 2:8-9 (NIV) 8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

The first to hear the news were humble shepherds. On that wintry night they were naturally huddled close to their fire. Suddenly, as if a star had burst, glory dazzled the night, and an angel stepped out of heaven to deliver a glorious message.

Luke 2:10-11(NIV) 10"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

Shepherds were despised by the "good," respectable people of the day. They were regarded as thieves. The only ones lower than shepherds at this time in Jewish history were lepers.

It was to them that God chose to give the first glorious news of the Messiah's birth to remind us that the Savior is for everyone—and to let us know that He is accessible.

The message was not just for the shepherds—they were to share the news of this joy with others, which they immediately did after they visited the baby.

The message is for us and all people everywhere--“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

It is not enough to peek in the manger and say, “Oh, how nice. What a lovely scene. It makes me feel good.”

The terrifying thing about Christmas is that it can be buried by the hassle of materialism, busyness, and sentiment. This is when people do not even know or care what Christmas really represents.

God wants us to know that He always comes to those who sense their need. The baby of Christmas—the Messiah, the Savior—is for those who need Jesus.

The joy of Christmas is that He did come into this world as a humble baby. As a man He did die on the cross for our sins. He did rise to life again three days later.

And because of all this, He can come into your heart. This is how you find real joy. This Christmas let us lay down our lives before Him and receive the one, perfect Gift. Receive Him as your Savior, surrender to Him as your Lord.

Remember that Jesus came because we need Him. He came to restore hope to those who think there is no hope. He came to carry our grief and sorrows so that we don't have to bear them ourselves.

Jesus came to turn our mourning into joy. He came so that we would never have to feel alone again. He came to bring peace to a world filled with fighting and war.

He came to show us what real love is—not seeing how much we can get, rather how much we can give, by giving us a heart of compassion and mercy toward others.

Jesus is the real key to joy in our lives.