

Reason for Joy

Joy comes in recognizing and receiving the LORD’s salvation.

.....Isaiah 12: 2 – 6.....

“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; ³With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴In that day you will say: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. ⁵Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. ⁶Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

.....Luke 2: 8 – 14 (15 – 38).....

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹And angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, ‘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. ¹²This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ ¹³Suddenly 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.”

Today we lit the third Advent Candle, which is called the ‘Joy’ candle. Sometimes ‘Christmas Joy’ gets confused with a kind of fleeting, superficial joy. But God’s gift of joy is deeper than just a feeling and is present even when our lives are difficult.

The kind of ‘joy’ that the prophet Isaiah told us that God brings in our Old Testament reading today is different than ‘happiness’. It’s the same ‘**joy**’ the angel was talking about when he said to the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born: ***‘Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!’*** (Luke 2:10)

My neighbors have a huge red glittery sign in their front yard that says **‘JOY!’** I think that my neighbors have it right. You can see that in the middle of the ‘O’ of JOY there is a silhouette of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus.

God has given us a reason for ‘joy’ that is a lasting joy; a ‘joy’ that is for all year, for every single day, and for all of life. *That’s* the kind of JOY God wants us to have.

Isaiah was God’s prophet to the kings of Israel and Judah for fifty years. During this time the Northern Kingdom, called Israel, and its capital, Samaria, fell to the Assyrians. Over the next 100 years, bits of Judah were captured until 586 B.C., when the holy city, Jerusalem, was overtaken and the last of the Israelites were led away into Babylonia as captives.

During one of Israel’s darkest eras, when they felt lost and devastated, and their nation was destroyed, Isaiah’s words were meant to bring God’s people hope. Isaiah’s prophecy brought them the joy of knowing that they were not forgotten by God, and that one-day God would rescue them.

The Nation’s disobedience and disregard for God had brought them to a place of darkness. For hundreds of years, Israel had waited for God’s Deliverer. Even when they were allowed to return to Judah and Jerusalem during the next centuries, Israel was still ruled by foreign powers.

God gave Isaiah a vision of what was to come; that one day, the **‘people walking in darkness would see a great light.’** (Isaiah 9:2)

On that day, God promised to **‘shatter the yoke that burdened them.’** (Isaiah 9:4) Isaiah told Israel that their ‘joy’ would come because of a little child.

Isaiah said, **‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... and he will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, ... with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.’** (Isaiah 9: 6- 7)

As we read in the first chapters of Isaiah, God had revealed that even though King David’s lineage would appear to have ended, the seemingly lifeless **‘stump of Jesse’**, who was David’s father, would sprout a **‘Branch’**. (Isaiah 11: 1-5)

Isaiah brought the *good news* to Israel that against all odds, one day, Israel would once again have a King who would lead them in **‘righteousness’** and **‘justice’**, and that he would bring **‘peace’** and the **‘knowledge of the LORD’** to God’s people. (Isaiah 12: 6 – 9)

Isaiah wrote that the **‘Spirit of the Lord (would) rest upon’** this descendant of Jesse and David, and that by him the Lord would **‘reclaim the remnant’** of His people. (Isaiah 12:2,10)

The Angel said to the shepherds, **‘I bring you good news of great joy.’** And then the Angel told them the reason why they would rejoice: **‘Today... a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.’**

Israel had been waiting a long time for God to send them a Savior. The **‘salvation’** that Isaiah spoke of is this promise of God’s restoration of His people. The Hebrew word for **‘salvation’** is **‘yeshua’** (Yesh-oo-ah). It means *‘deliverance,’ ‘help,’* and *‘victory.’*

Do you remember what the angel Gabriel told Mary to name her son? (Luke 1:31) He said, **‘You are to give him the name Jesus...’**

In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, his name would have been pronounced, **‘Yeshua,’** and meant, *‘The LORD (Yahweh) saves.’* It is a conjunction of ‘Ya’ for ‘Yahweh’ and the verb ‘yasa’ (Yah-shayh) for ‘saves’.¹

Jesus’ name was a common one, because it was a shortened version of the name, **‘Yehoshua’**, or Joshua, who led Israel into the Promised Land and conquered Canaan. Because many Jewish boys were named after Joshua, Jesus was known as **‘Yeshua from Nazareth.’**²

You may be wondering why we call Jesus a different name than his mother would have. **Yeshua’s** name was translated into Greek when the New Testament was written. In Greek, **Yeshua** is **‘Iesous’** (Ee-sous). Our English language began in a period of time when the ‘i’ or ‘ee’

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3467/niv/wlc/0-1/>

² <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>. <https://www.gotquestions.org/meaning-name-Jesus.html>

sounds of Greek were replaced with a ‘j’ sound. The ‘sh’ sounds were also replaced with a ‘z’ sound. That is why we English speaking people today refer to ‘Yeshua’, as ‘Jesus’ (*Jee-zus*).

Regardless of the pronunciation, Jesus’ name describes the mission for which he was born. Jesus was sent from God to pour out His Salvation upon God’s beloved people.

Seven hundred years after God gave Isaiah His word, the wait was finally over. The Child God had promised arrived. After waiting for so long, it’s no wonder that the angels sang when Jesus was born!

Whether or not the angels in the sky outside of Bethlehem actually sang the ‘*Hallelujah Chorus*’, Luke doesn’t tell us. But Luke does tell us that the angels gave this newborn child three titles: **‘a Savior ... (who) is Christ the Lord.’**

The word, **SAVIOR**, implies that Jesus was to ‘save’ God’s people from something. What did they need ‘saving’ from?

The Jews thought that what they most needed ‘saving’ from was the Romans who ruled over them. But God knew that they needed salvation from something far greater. We also often ask God to ‘rescue’ us from our circumstances and from those who oppress us, but God knows that we need His salvation for the main thing, which is the problem of our sin.

If we didn’t have the Bible, we might not realize that we have a problem with sin.

When John the Baptist was born, his father, who was the priest Zechariah, was **‘filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and prophesied’** over him. Zechariah said, **‘Praise be... to the God of Israel, because he has come and redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as He said through his holy prophets of long ago... You my child, will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins... ‘ (Luke 1:76)**

The sin of Adam and Eve’s disobeying God is what plunged the world into darkness and everything and everyone fell under the power of the Evil One. When Adam and Eve were no longer permitted to live in Eden, they, and all of their children after them, including you and me, were plagued by the disease of sin, which kept them (*and us*) separated from God.

Through Abraham, God created a nation of people, through whom God planned to release the world from the grip of Satan and sin. His plan unfolded over thousands of years, as God’s people went through many trials, testings, and tribulations as they waited and prayed for God to ‘save’ them.

Through His prophets, God promised to send Israel a ‘Savior’ through whom God would ‘deliver’ and ‘rescue’ His people from their affliction. The person whom God ‘anointed’ for this mission was called, in Hebrew, ‘*Masiah*’ (*maw-shee’-akh*), or as we would say, ‘*Messiah*’. In Greek, God’s anointed one was known as ‘*Christos*’ (*khris-tos*), or as we know him, **CHRIST**.

The angel announced Jesus as ‘the LORD’, because God appointed him ‘**master**’ over everything. Caesar Augustus was Emperor over the Roman Empire at the time, and he claimed that he was the ‘*Lord*’.

The heavenly witnesses, however, revealed the truth about who was the *real* ruler of the world. Even though just an infant, Jesus was already, **‘Savior, Messiah, and Lord.’**

Even the angels rejoiced at the amazing way God was bringing His Salvation to the world. It was so surprising, and yet so perfect. God’s plan was to send His Son, who was divine like HIm, to also become a human being. By taking on our human nature, Jesus’ mission was to live a perfectly obedient life on behalf of all humans. As our ‘perfect’ representative, Jesus fulfilled God’s requirement for us to be holy as he is holy.

Not only did Jesus come to live a sinless human life, but Jesus also became one of us so that he could take the penalty for our sin upon himself. Only he could do this, being fully human and fully holy. God sent Jesus to be a perfect sacrificial offering for our sin.

That is why John called Jesus, **‘the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.’** (*John 1:29*) Just like the unblemished lambs who were offered at the Temple for the sins of the people, Jesus offered himself for the forgiveness of our sins.

When Jesus died upon the cross, it was as Isaiah had prophesied, **‘he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.’** (*Isaiah 53:5*) Jesus came so that our sins would never again separate us from God’s favor.

The angels were amazed at what God and Jesus were up to and when we realize the magnitude of what Jesus came to do for us, we should be overcome with joy and gratitude.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet Micah had said he would, 700 years earlier. (*Micah 5:2,4*) Joseph and Mary had traveled the 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem, because of a decree that each person should be registered at the place of his ancestry. Joseph was from the lineage of David, so they went to the city where David was born and lived as the shepherd son of Jesse before he was King of Israel.

The name, ‘Bethlehem,’ means ‘house of bread’ (*bayth leh'-khem*).³ Jesus became for us ‘the bread of life’ through whom we are able to receive God’s gift of salvation to eternal life.

Jesus was born to bring salvation to God’s people, Israel. We who are not Jewish are blessed to be ‘grafted in’ and made eligible, through faith in Jesus, to also receive God’s gift of salvation.

Jesus offers every single person in the world forgiveness of sin and a place with God now and for eternity.

When the world around us erupts in darkness and tragedy, we who have accepted Jesus’ redemption can rest secure in the deep joy that trusting in God’s salvation brings. Amen.

³ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1035/kjv/wlc/0-1/>