

Rejoicing in the Way

Christmas Day – 12/25/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: John 1:1-14 (and Luke's account of Christ's birth)

Pastor Keith Besel

v. 14 **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

Introduction

✘ I'm not saying anything new when I tell you that Christmas is a time to celebrate. And for this Christian holiday, the entire world, does not hesitate to join in and help us Christians as we feast, sing, play, drink and give parties; ... that is ... as long as we don't let “Christ” come in and spoil “Christ”mas.

➔ For as soon as we narrow the focus of Christmas upon Christ, what happens? The world works doubly hard to keep the birth of Christ out of the celebration; to initiate and support any and all efforts to “keep Church and State separate”; to separate Church and business, Church and school – even Church and family. It seems as if the worst unimaginable thing in the world's way of celebrating is to allow any religious influence into the celebration. As I've heard over and over from various sources again this year: time with family, lots of great food, party after party, giving the children whatever their hearts desire and more – that's “the real meaning”; that's what Christmas “is all about”.

✘ Which begs the question, “Should a child of God then fight the world and its ways about Christmas?” Or should believers discover, as 1 John 5:4 tells us, that it's in “our faith” – not in the laws or ordinances or the traditions of the world – that we have the “victory that overcomes the world”?

➔ We need to recognize and even expect that there will be persecution, but it's then that we turn the other cheek, carry on in Christ, train our family, find strength in our Lord, serve and share wherever we can, attend our gatherings, and support the causes that promote the teachings and the work of our Lord.

✘ As verse five of our text says, this world is filled with darkness; the darkness of sin and unbelief and ignorance to the truth that has come into the world in Jesus. So instead of us fighting against them in anger, we must first understand that the world cannot celebrate something that it often simply does not know. As the Bible says in a number of places, they have eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear, minds but do not understand (Mk. 8:18). And 1 Corinthians 2:14 explains that “the natural person (i.e. a person without faith) does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned”.

➔ Knowing that this is the culture in which we live; the same culture into which Jesus came as “the true light” (v. 9), helps those of us who know Jesus as “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:6) to better understand the path of our Christian lives, doesn't it? We are more able to see that our purpose, in light of all of the darkness around us, is so much more than just parties and drinking and food and decorations and even time with family eating cookies and singing carols.

➔ No, our purpose and our celebration is more fully defined by things like praying for those who do not know Jesus, and asking God to use us in His way to bring them the same hope in Christ that He has brought to us, and praising God for His gifts of grace as we gather regularly in His name for worship, and to study and grow in our understanding of His Word, and to spend time in humility searching our own hearts and the ways that we interact with family and friends and others – believers and unbelievers alike.

I. We Rejoice to Know the Way in Christ

- ⊗ The Book of Acts takes great effort to proclaim Jesus' coming in the flesh. It refers to the Christian faith as "the Way" at least five times. Those early Christians recognized the death and resurrection of Jesus as the way; the only way to obtain forgiveness of sins and salvation for the whole world. He was the promised Messiah; the one appointed from the very beginning when He was designated as God's creative Word; as the source of life itself.
 - Verse three says that "without Him was not any thing made that was made", including life itself (v.4). So not only would you and I not even exist without Jesus, after we fell into sin and needed Jesus to take on our human nature and flesh, we need to see that He could not have done that, if He was not first the very Creator of the human life and flesh that He came to occupy for us all.
- ⊗ Normally the word "way" has different meanings. It could be a road (like "the way to Bethlehem"), or a highway through the desert (for travelers or exiles to come home), or the road back to God (such as the prodigal son did through repentance and forgiveness). When Jesus said, "I am the way..." He tells us that He is referring to the spiritual path to God, because He finishes with the words, "no one comes to the Father but by Me" (Jn. 14:6).
 - Mary and Joseph's trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem was neither easy nor joyful. Mary was pregnant and their trip of almost 100 miles was dictated by a national census. So the way would have been crowded as well.
 - And why the census? Rome wanted to know how many soldiers would be required to maintain their control over this contentious area of primarily unhappy Jews. So having an accurate count of the population helped them keep tabs on how much they needed to receive in taxes from the people.
- ⊗ Because God picked this time for His "Word to become flesh and dwell among us" it meant neither Rome nor Palestine could know that among those traveling to Bethlehem was none other than the Almighty Lord Himself, incognito in the womb of a young lady betrothed to a simple carpenter. But this was no ordinary unborn child traveling along the busy way; this was God Himself coming to destroy all the works of Satan and to save all souls, whether Jew or Babylonian or Roman.
 - This gives us all a reason to rejoice in God's plan of bringing His way back into His loving arms through His promised Christ; His only begotten Son. Because we all have lives that are filled with dangers, emergencies, unknown difficulties, unrest, upsetting situations and enemies lurking behind the various bends and turns of our existence.
 - Yet still, we have an inner joy which no one can take from us in knowing that God is at hand; God is in control; God guides each and every situation in our lives as Romans 8:28 promises, "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose". Granted, we do not know what lies ahead on our path of life, but all we need to ask is if we know Jesus as the Way. For the King of kings and Lord of lords is on the path we walk; by our side, because He's the one who has prepared the way ahead for us.
- ⊗ Finding lodging in little Bethlehem had always been a problem, now it was total confusion. Those who had left throughout the years to seek work and fortune, now were coming home to be counted. The town was overrun with pilgrims so that the only place available for Mary, Joseph and soon-to-be born Jesus was the place where animals fed and stayed.
 - How amazing that the Lord Almighty, whom the heavens themselves cannot contain, according to 1 Kings 8:27, appeared in one tiny little human body of flesh and blood and bone, and is laid in a manger.

✘ There's an important lesson for all of us here – God always provides what we need, not necessarily what we prefer. Just as with His Son, Jesus, God has always gone ahead and seen to it that something is always there for us. Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:6-7, “There is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world”. In fact, often it's the poor of this world who know His love and care more than the wealthy. But whether wealthy or poor, God be praised when we know Him and His care for us!

➔ Mary wondered how her son could even be conceived, but today we celebrate that He is born. And as Joseph was told by the angel Gabriel, he named Him Jesus, because He would save people of every nation from their sins. And now, just as the shepherds came to them, filled with awe at the news they received from the angels and rejoicing at His birth, Mary and Joseph also rejoiced at this great gift from God – who was Himself God in the flesh!

✘ It just blows the mind, doesn't it, to think about and see how every single bit of this world and our existence and Jesus' existence in flesh and His work of salvation is so intertwined and connected and 100% dependent upon Him and His nature as God of Gods and yet human being in earthly flesh! All of it centers around Him, as Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless Yahweh builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” He willingly humbled Himself as a servant and took our place. He died for all, even the ungodly, desiring “all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

II. We Celebrate that We know Him & Pray that Others may find our Joy

✘ So, our joy today is about more than just that Mary had a safe delivery or that a baby was born, even though the Bible tells us that “children are a heritage from Yahweh, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Ps. 127:3).

➔ What we celebrate today is the very definition of “extra—ordinary”! This was the birth of the One and only person in all of history designated to be Savior of the world! This is God in the flesh. The Infinite came as an infant. He who is eternally spirit without beginning or end, came in flesh and now is both spirit and flesh forevermore. This is the Creator, Sustainer, Judge and Redeemer, all wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

✘ It's this knowledge; this faith that gives us the hope and continued joy which God freely showers upon us all and desires all mankind to have. We all know how the unstoppable giggle and joy of a child is unbearable contagious right? You hear it and it grabs ahold of you so that you just can't help but start giggling yourself.

➔ Well, my beloved Christians, you and I – we are the joy-filled children; God's beloved children from the moment of our baptism. And the joy of Jesus as our Savior and God fills us all to the top and overflowing! Yet, sadly so many have either lost their joy or do not know of the joy in Jesus's birth and life and death and resurrection and victory for us all over everything that darkens this world.

➔ God has filled us with this joy to enjoy, yes. But even more He wants you and me friends to be the contagious, giggling children of God; those who are so filled with His love and truth that we can't help but tell it from the mountain top that Jesus is the way; the only way to heaven; to salvation; to eternal bliss before the almighty and all-loving God over all!

✘ Luke 2:17-18 started the “giggling” with joy and set the model for you and me and all Christians to follow, “And when [the shepherds] saw [the child in the manger], they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them”.

➔ As you and I, today, celebrate knowing Jesus as the Way, may He strengthen and help us all, so that we share our joy with others in such a way that they too will “wonder” at our Jesus-joy and will then come to know Him in eternal joy as well. Amen.