

## Christmas Joy

John 8:48-59

There were a number of people who were looking forward to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

If we were able to take a survey of the Jewish people living around three or four B.C. I think we would be very hard pressed to find someone who was unaware of the promises in the Holy Scriptures of a Messiah/Saviour.

Out of the multitudes of people eagerly anticipating the fulfillment of these promises, the LORD had chosen to send some angels to a handful of people to say the time had come.

People like Zechariah. A priest who had served the LORD for many years who was married to a woman named Elizabeth.

God sent Gabriel to him to tell him that he and his wife would have a son, to name the boy John, and that this boy would be the one to prepare the way for the LORD's messiah.

Because he was old, Zechariah had a hard time believing Gabriel and as a consequence lost the ability to speak until his son's birth.

When he was able to speak again, he bursts out in joyful praise at the thought of the messiah coming into the world.

God also sent Gabriel to a young woman named Mary.

He told her that she would be the mother of the Messiah and that it would happen in a most miraculous way.

I think we can all agree that would be a lot to take in but she receives the news in humility and willfully embraces what God has chosen her to do.

Mary just happens to be a relative of Elizabeth and shortly after being visited by Gabriel goes for a family visit.

The Holy Spirit was upon John even in his mother's womb and when Mary shows up the Bible says he, "leaped for joy" in his mother's womb at Jesus' arrival.

Do you know what Mary does after she hears this news from Elizabeth? She breaks out into a song of joyful praise at what God is doing.

When the time comes Mary and her husband Joseph travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem and Jesus is born and an angel appears to some shepherds who were watching their sheep near the small town.

Of course the shepherds are terrified at the sight, but the angel says to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

Soon a "multitude of the heavenly host" are praising God for this amazing little boy "wrapped in swaddling cloths and laying in a manger."

The shepherds go into town telling a bunch of people about what the angel had said, they see Jesus and then they return to their sheep “*glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen...*”

While the word joy is not specifically used to describe the shepherd that is certainly the impression we are given.

We could go on, but that is enough to see that one of the themes of the birth of Jesus is joy.

I believe the joy experienced at that first Christmas is for all who believe throughout all of history.

The promise of Jesus coming is first made in Genesis 3:15 as Adam and Eve were hearing about the consequences of their disobedience to God.

The news of Jesus birth is throughout the scriptures and it is for all of God’s people.

[We can see a clear example of that in our text for this morning **John 8:48-59**. What takes place in these verses happens about thirty three years after Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem and it concerns a man who lived around two thousand years before Jesus was born. This man was looking forward to Jesus’ coming and he did so in joy. As we are a week away from Christmas I want to turn our attention to the joy of Jesus’ coming. I believe there are some important lessons for us about Christmas joy in this passage. The first one is worth our careful consideration, it is a warning that we would be wise to take to heart. The lesson is that...]

### **Point #1 – Christmas joy can be missed. (Verses 48-53)**

It is possible to have the coming of Jesus to earth right in front of your face and fail to see it.

*One of the things you will discover about Jesus when you read the gospels is that people get angry with Him on a somewhat regular basis.*

He never backs away from the truth, even when it makes people upset.

That is the context of this passage here in John 8.

He has told his listeners that they are slaves, illegitimate children, and children of the devil.

He says all of those things because the people listening to Him were resisting the truth of what He had to say and in the process were rejecting Him as well.

Like most people, these guys got offended by what Jesus had to say and they respond here in **verse 48** like this...

Most commentators will tell you that the Jews considered Samaritans to come from questionable parentage and so that was a way of saying Jesus was an illegitimate child

and obviously saying he has a demon is a way of trying to connect him to the devil.

They don't like what Jesus had to say to them so they repackage His accusation against them and fire it back in his direction.

Not very original nor does it do anything to refute what Jesus had said to them.

Undeterred Jesus says this in **Verses 49-51.**

*I love how the LORD handles that situation. He does not go into a long argument to defend Himself, He simply states the truth and then applies it.*

He is completely confident in the truth of His obedience to the Father and the Father's commitment to glorify Him and sort everything out.

The Father constantly shows throughout Jesus' earthly life and ministry that He is God the Son and that the only way to be right with God is through the Son.

That is why He says what he does in verse 51.

I like how the ESV translates the beginning of the verse. Do you see it there? It says, "Truly, truly..."

That translates the Greek word ἀμήν which is a way of emphatically saying something is true.

And Jesus says it twice for extra emphasis. It is His way of saying this is as true as true can be.

What is so true? That He is the way to eternal life.

Brothers and sisters that is the whole reason Christmas happens.

Jesus is born so that death can be defeated to the eternal praise of His Name.

That is reason to rejoice!

*That joy is right in front of their face and this is how they respond. (Verse 52-53)*

They are mostly right in what they say here.

Abraham, though he was the father of the nation of Israel, he died.

The prophets, for all of their faithfulness and all of the miracles performed by them, they died (with the exception of Elijah).

That would mean that in order for Jesus to be right about giving eternal life to people, He would have to be greater than Abraham and the prophets.

That thought is beyond them. As they look at Jesus they only see His humanity, they don't like His insights into who they are, and so they take offense instead of rejoice.

The king of kings is standing right in front of them, but they can't see it.

[That happened on the first Christmas too, didn't it? The most important person ever to be born and He spent his first night in a feeding trough for animals. With the exception of a handful of shepherds and some of the people they told, people would have seen an ordinary baby born to ordinary people. For most people it was just another day in Bethlehem. Most people missed the joy of Christmas.]

That same thing is happening today.

God has left no doubt about Who Jesus is, and yet most people go through the Christmas season without giving Him much of a thought.

People put up trees, buy gifts, prepare meals, and pay no attention to Christ.

Many people in our day get offended at the phrase 'Merry Christmas' and would like to see Christmas removed as a holiday in Canada.

Many people will sit in church pews for the only time this year, hear some songs, hear a bible readings, and maybe tolerate some guy talking to them for a few minutes and then get on with whatever they want to do.

[Many people will come face to face with Jesus this Christmas season and miss seeing Him and if you miss seeing Jesus, I mean truly seeing Him, you will miss the joy of Christmas. Look there is no gift that you will find under a tree on Christmas morning that can give you what you truly need. If you have celebrated more than a few Christmases you know that is true. All that stuff will eventually let you down. It will never be enough to give you lasting joy. The joy of Christmas is something altogether different. We can see that in the next couple of verses. We learn there that...]

## **Point #2 – God's glory displayed in Christ is the joy of Christmas. (Verse 54-56)**

From the appearance of angels to the working of miracles, the LORD has put His clear stamp of approval upon the life and ministry of Jesus.

While their attitude is not good which means they don't really want to hear the true answer to their question, the question that they ask Jesus at the end of verse 53 is a really good question.

They ask, "Who do you make yourself out to be?"

They are likely asking with the attitude, "Who do you think you are?"

In other words the intent behind the question is you are making yourself out to be something you are not.

This is how Jesus responds...(Verse 54-55)

Jesus is speaking here in His humanity.

In His humanity He doesn't make Himself out to be anything.

In other words, He does not do anything to try and make Himself appear to be more than He is.

Quite the opposite in fact.

What we find in the life of Jesus is the purest form of humility possible for a human being.

We never see Jesus making a show of Himself in the gospels.

There are no fancy clothes or productions.

There is no fakery or deceit.

There is no taking advantage of people.

What did He do instead? He served people. Associated with the poor, the lowly, and the outcast.

He holds no formal position of power in society or government.

His point here is to say that He has done nothing in worldly terms to make Himself into something, rather it is God the Father Who has done all sorts of things to call attention to Who Jesus truly is.

It was the Father who sent angels to announce Jesus' birth.

It was the Father who moved the heart of the Emperor of Rome to affect the whole of the Roman Empire so that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem as it was foretold by the prophet Micah.

It was the Father who moved in the hearts of kings from the east to come and worship this baby boy.

It was the Father who spoke from heaven at His baptism saying, "This is my Son, whom I love, and with Him I am well pleased."

Jesus never makes Himself more than He is, but it is also true He can never deny Who He is.

He cannot deny His relationship with the Father and He cannot deny His faithfulness to all that the Father asks of Him.

That is the joy of Christmas brothers and sisters.

The joy is that One has been born in Whom God the Father fully delights and is happy to glorify.

That is the very ground upon which Jesus is able to save us.

Is Jesus greater than Abraham and the prophets?

Yes He is and He points out here that Abraham knew it. (**Verse 56**).

Some commentators think Abraham saw in Genesis 17 the promise of the coming messiah and the new age He would usher in as the LORD had promised that kings would be among his descendants.

Whether Jesus is referring to that or something else it is clear that Abraham had some understanding of what God would do for him and everyone who believes God.

He understood that someone would be born according to the power of God for the glory of God to save God's people and it made him happy.

[If you read Abraham's story you will find some ups and downs, but you will also find a man who believed God. He came to trust God so much that he was willing to fully trust the life of the only son born to him by his wife Sarah. I am convinced he did that because he believed in the power of God to raise the dead. I'm convinced that is why he bought a strip of land for a burial place in the promise land. He believed that God would send a messiah and that through Him the grave would be conquered and all of God's promises would be fulfilled. He looked ahead saw that and rejoiced.]

That is the joy of Christmas.

Abraham had it looking forward.

Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the kings, and some others had it when Jesus was born.

The disciples, about 500 of them, had it when Jesus appeared to them after being raised from the dead.

We have it as we look back on those things by faith and as we look forward to our Saviour Who lives and reigns forever coming again to make all things new.

[Christmas is so much more than a baby being born. Jesus is so much more than an ordinary guy who lived a long time ago and did some memorable things. This is the glory of God being displayed to the fullest measure in the Son He loves. And because He does that, we can have the hope of eternal life. There is no greater offer of joy than that. That is what Christmas is all about. That brings us to one more important lesson from this text. It's already been hinted at but it comes to the forefront in the next few verses. It is good to hear the warning that we can miss Christmas joy and it is good to know that the joy of Christmas is the glory of God displayed in Christ, but we also need to know that...]

### **Point #3 – Christmas joy is possible because God does the impossible. (Verses 57-59)**

The story of Jesus goes back much farther than His birth in Bethlehem, it goes back into all eternity past.

The people upset with Jesus aren't thinking to themselves, "Is He talking about Genesis 17 here?"

They hear it as though Jesus had talked to Abraham first hand and so they say this to him. **(Verse 57).**

The math is impossible here. Everybody knows Abraham lived and died around 1800-2000 before Jesus' was born.

How could Jesus, being so young, have possibly seen and talked with him?

It is a fair question although I doubt they asked it wanting to know the real answer.

If I said that I had personally spoken with Canada's first Prime Minister Sir John A. MacDonald you would rightly question my sanity.

He died in 1891 and I was born in 1979. That math doesn't work.

So how can Jesus say what He says?

He could have pointed to a passage of Scripture to defend His statement, but He does something very different instead. (Verse 58).

Again just like in verse 51 we see the emphatic "Truly truly..." at the beginning of His answer.

Those words leave us with only three options regarding what He says here. One Jesus is a bold faced liar, two He is completely insane, or three He is telling the truth.

His answer here is claiming something more than He existed before Abraham.

If that is all He had meant he would have said, "Before Abraham was, I was."

Instead He chooses to say, "Before Abraham was, **I AM.**"

That is how the LORD almighty introduced Himself to Moses at the burning bush.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the exact same phrase in Exodus 3 that Jesus uses here in verse 58.

God intends a whole bunch of good theology to be conveyed by referring to Himself as I AM or the God Who is.

He communicates His eternal nature in His name. He has always existed for all eternity past and will exist for all eternity future.

He is telling us about His aseity. Meaning He exists in and of Himself. There is nothing He depends on to be Who He is.

He is telling us about His immutability. Meaning He does not change. His greatness neither increases or decreases, His character, knowledge, and attributes are constant and consistent forever.

These things and whatever else might be rightly understood by the phrase I AM are things that are only true of God.

You can only claim self-existence if you have always existed.

You can only claim to be unchanging if you depend on nothing outside of yourself.

Only God can claim these things. Jesus knows that. This is no slip of the tongue or misunderstanding.

Jesus is claiming to possess the fullness of what it means to be God Himself.

His listeners get it right away (**Verse 59**).

*If Jesus is insane or lying then what they do here is right.*

Leviticus 24:16 says, “...***anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him...***”

A mere human being claiming to be God is total blasphemy because the claim makes God far less than He is.

On the other hand, if what Jesus says here is true, then something happened when Jesus was conceived by the power of God in Mary’s womb that is completely beyond our understanding, something that seems completely impossible.

It would mean that God was able to join the full divinity of the Son with true humanity in One Person.

It would mean infinity was joined to finiteness without either quality interfering with the other.

This I believe is the greatest mystery of the Christian faith, the greatest work God has ever performed, and it is the very reason why Christmas joy is possible, because it has to be true if we are to be saved because it is the only possible way for us to be made right with God.

*The blood of sheep and goats cannot wipe away our debt of disobedience before a Holy God.*

Only a human being perfect in every way could stand in our place.

But if our Saviour were only human He would lack the capacity to pay the debt of every sinner who believes on His Name.

It is only because He is infinitely worthy that He can save us all.

Notice here that the stoning doesn’t happen!

Why is that? It is not because Jesus is really good at dodging people or that He can run really fast.

It is because of His sovereign power over all of life.

*Besides being powerful He is also gracious.*



He could have killed them all with a thought and would have been right to do so because in wanting to stone Him they were guilty of the very blasphemy they were accusing Him of.

Instead He exercises His power to simply walk away.

He does that on several occasions. Not only that, He also commands the wind and the waves, He walks on water, He does miracles of creation, He heals the sick, casts out demons, raises the dead, and most importantly was Himself raised from the dead after willingly surrendering His life to die in our place.

No ordinary man can do those things and yet He also got hungry, needed to sleep, and He did die.

God doesn't do any of those things.

So here is the mystery and the joy of Christmas.

Almighty God joined with humanity in Mary's womb and was born into the world in Bethlehem.

God does what seems impossible and that is why true Christmas joy is possible.

*The only question that remains is do you have it?*

Do you have Christmas Joy in your life?

It can be missed.

If you don't see the glory of God in Christ you will miss it.

If you refuse to accept that God can do what seems impossible to you, you will miss it.

Don't miss it because Christmas Joy is real and true joy that lasts for much longer than a day or a few weeks.

It lasts forever because it is the work of our unchanging all powerful all glorious God.

Let's pray.