

Joy to the World

Luke 2:1-20

Crossroads Christian Church

Dec. 24, 2013

Christmas Eve

How many times have you heard the story from Luke's Gospel that you heard just now? You have heard it in Christmas Eve services and Christmas Sunday services for as long as you've been coming to church. You've probably heard it in Christmas programs, recited as kids in bathrobes and bare feet shuffle solemnly across a stage, coming to see the baby in a cardboard manger.

This wonderful old, old story is preserved in the writing of the Gospel of Luke, but it is also preserved each year when we hear it, when we tell it again. It's preserved in the way that we lay out our crèches or manger scenes, lining the figures up around the crib. It's preserved in great art. It's preserved as elderly people gather for worship in nursing homes. It's preserved as chaplains give communion to their flocks in distant battlefields. Whenever we hear it, it's the same story. Mary, the young woman in an astounding situation. Joseph, troubled, yet trusting the angel and trusting Mary. The long cross-country trip. The minimal shelter and hospitality of a stable. The birth. The baby born and wrapped in strips of cloth to keep him warm, laid upon a bed of straw. Shepherds hearing angels sing Gloria and going into Bethlehem to see what wonderful thing that God has done.

We all love that story so dearly. It speaks of God's love in a unique way. God gave us a baby who would grow into a Savior, a Messiah for the whole world. That is the gift, the awesome gift, of God's transforming love. It's an old, old story, but it's a story that makes us new.

The story makes us new by digging underneath all those walls of cynicism and suspicion that we erect to protect ourselves, to show us the utter vulnerability of a God who sent a little child to show us the way. This God took such a risk in hoping that we would respond. We talk of taking leaps of faith in giving ourselves to God, but here God

took a leap of faith in giving God's self to us. And those walls of cynicism and suspicion quake just a bit when we think of Mary, likely a teenage girl, totally trusting in God, letting God do something marvelous through her, and celebrating that the world will never be the same because of that.

The story makes us new by realizing that each new child in our midst is a miracle of life, a potential gift from God. We can cherish our children and grandchildren, and we can protect and feed other people's children, because God came as a child.

The story makes us new by calling our attention away from the glitz and gaudiness of our affluent consumerism by contrasting it with the simple beauty of a sky lit by the glow of angels, singing Glory to God in the Highest.

The story makes us new by telling us that beyond all our assumptions that we know it all, or soon will, that everything has a logical explanation and a pragmatic use, by bring us face to face with a mystery, a sense of awe and wonder so deep that we fall on our knees.

The story makes us new by realizing that the greatest gift of all isn't from a catalog, isn't a new car in the driveway, or a diamond necklace, but the gift of a child, an expression of God's love. For that's the ultimate story of Christmas, the God loved us enough to send us Jesus Christ. As John puts it, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The God of the Universe, the God of Creation, the God of Majesty, has welcomed us into the family by sending us that baby born in Bethlehem's manger. We are not nonentities; we are not slaves; we are God's children, and heirs to the joy of God's love.

Joy. Joy to the World. Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come. Does that mean there will be no more pain, no more darkness of the soul, no more sin, no more envy, no more injustice, no more suffering, no more death? No. Not in this life, anyway. The joy of Christmas doesn't mean that everyone is happy, happy, happy; it doesn't usher us into a

fairytale existence where we all get just what we want for Christmas. Joy isn't a synonym for happiness or contentment. It's deeper than that. Joy is the deep inner awareness that no matter what life throws at us, we are loved by the source of all love, and that would be God. In good times and bad, in ecstasy and agony, in riches and poverty, in health and at the brink of death, joy is in knowing that each one of us is a beloved child of God, and that God's love will never, ever, ever let go, no matter what. It's that joy which caused Mary to sing; it's that joy which echoed in the heavens in the angels' chorus, and that made the shepherds run to the stable; it's the joy that makes this story never old, never clichéd, never dull, never stale. For it's the story of God's never-ending love.

So joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let each of us receive our king. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon