

Davidsons Mains Parish Church Sunday 14th December 2025

Sermon, Luke 2:1-20, Joy!

Intro

<joy! Slide>

As we journey through advent, waiting, patiently or impatiently for the coming of Christmas, in our sermon series we're looking at the themes of peace, joy, hope and love.

Last week we had the same bible passage, Luke's recording of the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, mum to be heavy with child, dad to be heavy with expectation. And the child is born, wrapped in bands of cloth and laid in a manger.

Then the shepherds, minding their own business on the hillside. Visited by a multitude of angels praising God and announcing the birth of the Saviour. "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" they are told (verse 10). And they then run to the manger, run to the saviour, amazed by this great news.

<Luke passage slide>

Today's sermon title is entitled 'Joy'. As the angels said "Do not be afraid, for I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people". Joy.

Which doesn't sound half bad for a sermon title I think. Joy.

What brings you joy? <what brings you joy?> slide

Let's take a moment to think about and celebrate the things that bring you joy.

I wondered how best to do this, I thought maybe I'd get people to shout out, but I thought I'd turn it into a game.

So I'll name some things that bring people joy, and if they bring *you* joy, then you get to agree, nod your head, say yes thumbs up. Ok? And if you get 5 things matching, you can shout 'mistletoe' and if you get *7 matching you can shout 'joy'. Ok?

1. A walk in nature
2. Unexpectedly seeing a warm and familiar face
3. Cats, pets,
4. Watching a film of your choice
5. A cringeworthy dad joke
6. Hot chocolate
7. A mystery book
8. Time with loved ones

9. A rainbow
10. Christmas jumpers
11. Music
12. Wild swimming
13. Roast potatoes
14. A glass of wine
15. Thoughtful presents
16. Long chat with a good friend

There are lots and lots of things that bring us joy, feelings of happiness, an internal warm hug of emotions.

The Church of England's theme for advent is 'joy' and Bishop Nicholas Papadopoulos listed 12 Christmas items that bring him joy, and produced a book of reflections and prayers about them.

<red book slide>

Let's see who agrees with his list.... The Christmas pudding, boxing day chutney, the chocolate selection, Pantomimes, Christmas jumpers, Christmas cake, falling pine needles, crackers and crowns, the bracing walk, a season of traditions, grandma's kitchen and the unwanted gift.

He argues that of course he loves the more serious aspects of this season, the carols and the bible readings, but the lighter hearted aspects of the season bring joy too, and can give us a glimpse of the divine.

All these things he lists are good. I'm not going to turn around and say that they're not. And I'm not going to say 'ahhhh....but'. They bring you joy and that is great. Being in a good mood is good. Joy is a key theme that runs through the whole story of the Bible.

There are various debates about happiness versus joy. Do they have separate meanings? Happiness is arguably fleeting, momentary, like eating a bar of chocolate, but then it passes. Versus joy which is deeper and richer, less fleeting.

<joy words slide>

Most languages have lots of words to describe this experience, like happy, cheerful, joyful, bliss, wonder, and so on. The same goes for the languages of the Bible.

In ancient biblical Hebrew there's a variety of words like simcha [sim-kha] sason [sa-son], or giyl [ge-el], and in the Greek New Testament there's chara, [kara] euphrosune, [u-fro-soon-A] or agalliasis [A-ge-lee-e-ses]. Each word has its own unique nuance, but they all basically refer to the feeling of joy and happiness.

What makes these biblical joy words interesting is noticing the kinds of things that bring happiness.

Here are some **examples from the bible of things described as bringing joy**. Let's see if you have any matches...

<things recorded in the bible slide>

- At the very beginning of the Bible, God says that this world is “very good.” And so it's natural that people find joy in beautiful and good things of life, like a good walk in nature, or a rainbow or a sunset. Even a wild swim! Brr.
- Animals are also very good. Psalm 65:13 describes the joy experienced from growing flocks or an abundant harvest on the hills.
- The poet of Psalm 104 says a good bottle of wine is God's gift “to bring joy to people's hearts.” Psalm 104:15
- People find joy at a wedding, Jeremiah 33:11
- Joy is found in their children. Proverbs 23:24-25
- There's even a Hebrew proverb that compares the joy that perfume brings to your nose with the joy a good friend brings to your heart. Proverbs 27:9. Good friends do bring us joy.

Wonderful.

Counter argument - But it's not all joy

But. There is a but of course.

and you all know what it is. You all feel it. I feel it. We see it all around us.

<joy...but slide>

Life isn't a festival of joy is it?

People can paint a big happy jolly face on themselves, or cover things up with tinsel, or drink too much of that good wine, so that the pain is numbed a bit... and they can pretend that everything is great for a day, or a week, or a season.

But life isn't a festival of joy. Human history isn't a joy fest. It's littered with pain and suffering.

Many people that I speak to this week and next week will be struggling to experience joy.

William Blake the poet said 'joy and woe are woven fine, a clothing for the soul divine'.

But do you know what? The biblical story doesn't pretend otherwise. For as many biblical quotes about joy, and love, and peace, I could find ones about grief, and suffering, and greed, and famine, and war....

The world is broken by human selfishness. That's the bible message. And it helps us to live in this world, this joy and pain filled world, because the bible offers a very unique perspective on joy. It takes it away from circumstances, from the now, from the things that change, and it places it in a different place, it frames it as an attitude that can be adopted, something we can choose to step into, rather than being blown about by the winds of fortune and responding either with or without joy.

That quite a big concept I think. It's quite challenging. And if we're not careful we can be quite trite, quite annoying with it, because the danger is that we say, 'hey friend, I know you're having a terrible time of it, but turn your frown upside down.... Jesus loves you'.

Is that helpful for those who are struggling? It's not is it. I mean. I know it's true that Jesus loves them, and that really is great news. But I'm not going to say that because it sounds like their pain is falling on deaf ears. It's being ignored. It's not important.

And that just isn't true.

Your pain and your suffering is important. To me. to God. to you. Joy isn't white washing over the reality of our lives. And hoping nothing shows through.

But it is also true that God's love and promises are not based on our circumstances. Whether we're having the best day ever. Or the worst, God's love and promises are based on His love for you. Whatever is going on.

And so the bible example is to adopt the joy that this brings.

I don't know if you've ever visited places or people where you may think people would be unhappy. Their circumstances are less than great, perhaps they are very very poor. They seem to have every reason to be unhappy. Yet they're not. Has anyone experienced this? I have seen joy in the poorest of communities across the world. Because their joy isn't connected to their material possessions, which is the temptation in the West.

Biblical joy goes beyond material possessions, and it goes beyond what is happening at that moment.

Bible examples of joy... regardless the of situation

<joy...despite slide>

Let's look at some biblical examples of when joy isn't associated with the direct things that are going on. It's associated with God's love and promises instead.

When the Israelites were suffering from slavery in Egypt, God raised up Moses to lead them into freedom, they flee and cross the waters and miraculously escape. and the first thing the Israelites did was sing for joy. The songs of Miriam, Moses and the Israelites can be found Exodus 15:1-21

Even though they were in the middle of a desert. They were vulnerable; the promised land was still far away. They rejoiced anyway.

Psalm 105 looks back on this story and they remembered how the Lord “caused his people to leave with joy, his chosen ones with shouts of joy.” (Psalm 105:43). This joy in the wilderness, this was a defining moment, a way of saying that the joy of God’s people is not determined by their struggles, they’d been through hell, but their joy was determined by their future destiny.

This theme appears again later in Israel’s story when Israel suffered under the oppression of foreign empires. The prophet Isaiah looked for the day when God would raise up a new deliverer. That’s when “those redeemed by the Lord will return to Zion with glad shouts, with eternal joy crowning their heads; happiness and joy will overtake them.” (Isaiah 51:11) And while the Israelites waited, they chose joy to anticipate their future redemption.

<joy is an act of resistance slide>

This is why Willie James Jennings says ‘Joy [is] an act of resistance against despair and its forces’. I’ll say that again “Joy [is] an act of resistance against despair and its forces’. Joy knows suffering, it longs for liberation, and it sustains hope: it’s an infectious delight that spreads outwards and draws others in.

So when Jesus is born... and the angels announce it with great joy. It’s not because they don’t know that the shepherds are cold and afraid, and no doubt very poor, ill-educated, on the fringes of society. None of that changed. But the joy they experienced, was true and deep and wide and could sustain them.

The joy Mary and Joseph felt didn’t mean that they weren’t petrified. Didn’t mean they wouldn’t struggle. Did anyone else have that feeling with their first born? Total fear...and total joy?

The joy the Magi felt about this wonderful, earth-shattering birth, didn’t blind them to the murderous and greedy plans of Herod.

The great joy, that Jesus, God in human flesh had to come to earth... God with us, here to conquer death and sin and suffering, is overwhelmingly wonderful. That’s why we celebrate it.

But Joy isn’t naive. It knows suffering. It longs for liberation. It sustains hope. And it is infectious.

Jesus and Joy

Let’s look at Jesus and joy

Jesus brought great joy, every time he healed, forgave a sin, cast out evil, the joy was immediate. Those who recognised him were filled with joy.

He also experienced joy...We're told that Jesus rejoiced and gave thanks to God his Father when he began to announce the Kingdom of God. Luke 10:21. That must have been quite a thing. Quite a cause for joy.

Jesus taught his followers the same joy in the wilderness, saying, "When people reject and persecute you for following me, rejoice, be very glad, because your reward is great in heaven." (Matthew 5:11-12)

After his death and resurrection, Jesus commissioned his followers to go out and announce the good news that he was the risen King of the world. And as they did so, the early Christian communities were known for being full of joy, even when they were persecuted (Acts 13:52).

When the apostle Paul was sitting in a dirty Roman prison, he could say that he'd chosen joy even if he gets executed. He called this the "joy of faith," or "joy in the Lord." (Philippians 1:25, 3:1) He believed it was the gift of God's Spirit, a sign that Jesus' presence is with him, inspiring hope in the midst of hardship (Thess 1:6). A candle burning in the darkness.

And when you believe that Jesus' love has overcome death itself, joy becomes reasonable in the darkest of circumstances.

Now this doesn't mean you ignore or suppress your sorrow. That's not healthy, it's not necessary. Paul often expressed his grief about missing loved ones or losing friends or his own freedom. He called it "being full of sorrow and yet rejoicing." (2 Corinthians 6:10). He acknowledged his pain, and he also made a choice to trust Jesus that this wouldn't be the final word.

This is very different from the trite advice to "turn that frown upside-down." Christian joy is a *profound* decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus' own life and love. And that's what biblical joy is all about.

Joy for All

I'm going to segue a bit here. Yesterday there was an event called 'Unite the Kingdom', one of its claimed aims is putting Christ back into Christmas. Excellent news. Yes? We want to have the saviour of the world in his own celebrations!

The group organising it leans to the very very right of politics, they want to encourage people to come to Christmas carol services. Good idea, yes? I love carols services! Do we welcome visitors? Of course we do.

Here's the thing though. Any event, any talk, any suggestion that Christ is only for a certain group of people, whatever the time of year, is not reading the text, not getting the big picture. Let's look at our line again, in Luke 2:10 let's remind ourselves who the joy is for....

<'do not be afraid' slide>

The angel said 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for *all* the people'. ALL the people. All. The angels were talking directly to folk who were afraid. There are a lot of scared people in the world. The message of joy, of the joy of Jesus. is for them. Is for all people, all classes, all races, all nationalities. Jesus doesn't have a flag.

Around the manger of the Christ child stood a young girl, a young man, new parents, terrified, little knowing they would soon have to flee their country and become refugees in a strange land. There stood the shepherds, poorly paid, poorly educated, filled with joy because the angels visited *them*. There stood the Kings, who travelled from far off lands, spoke different languages, held to different religious practices, they came to witness the birth of the one who would change the world.

There stood the animals, witnesses to the one who came to restore creation.

Everyone is welcome at the manger. You are welcome at the manger.

At the manger Jesus began his life long work of breaking *down* barriers, making room for all.

Everyone is welcome at all our services. Everyone is welcome in God's Kingdom. The Joy is for everyone.

For the broken, the lonely, those who feel far from the manger. For the frazzled folk who feel like they've lost something in the tinsel, the to-do lists and the wrapping paper. The joy is for those on their own, and those who would really rather have a minute to themselves!

And so I wish you joy. Joy in the things you love. And a deep uncontainable joy, which regardless of the situation you find yourself in, comes from knowing that you are loved by the Savior of the world.

'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for *all* the people'.

Amen.

Let's sing the invitation to all the nations, to join the angels praising and singing to Jesus. Hark the Herald Angels sing.