

**IN THOSE DAYS**  
**(3) AN ANGEL OF THE LORD**

Luke 2:8-14

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**SCRIPTURE**

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (Luke 2:8-14 NRSV).

**MESSAGE**

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent. Advent is a four week season of preparation leading up to the celebration of the birth of Christ – Christmas. The color for Advent is ordinarily purple and it represents somber reflection. It is based on its older cousin “Lent” which is a seven week season of preparation leading up to the celebration of the resurrection of Christ – Easter. The seasons of Lent and Advent are not in the Bible. They were created by the Church as teaching tools and as encouragements for spiritual discipline.

Early on in the practice of Lent someone raised an important question. “Do you expect me to stay depressed for seven straight weeks? That’s not right! Listen here, I don’t mean to spoil it for you but I know how this ends. And it ain’t the super grim, lemon sucking story you say it is. Yes, Jesus was killed. But three days later he was alive again and seen by hundreds of witnesses. In fact, he is still alive today. There’s no need for funeral faces. This is party time!”<sup>1</sup>

They all agreed. So they decided that on the third Sunday in Lent they would let the “cat out of the bag,” admit they served a Risen Lord, and they would celebrate with a joyful feast. The color for the day would be changed to pink.

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<sup>1</sup>(Note: This is a very loose interpretation of the historical account!)

Advent is modeled after Lent. And just like in Lent, we know how the Advent story ends. On the Third Sunday of Advent we let the “cat out of the bag,” admit we know our Savior has come, and we rejoice. The color of the candle for the Third Sunday is changed to pink.

When we grasp what the Lord has done for us we cannot help but show our appreciation. What better way to appreciate the joy the Lord has given to us than spreading that joy to others? Recall the words of songwriter Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World! The Lord is come.”<sup>2</sup>

This is an event so wonderful even the angels cannot contain themselves. No need for a Snickers® candy bar to cheer them up. They know the Savior has been born!

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11 NRSV).

Many Christians, including those in the Roman Catholic Church, and the Anglican Communion, refer to today as “Gaudete Sunday.” Gaudete (gow DATE tay) is Latin for “snicker.” Okay, technically it is Latin for “rejoice” but it is the kind of rejoicing that includes laughing at the devil and celebrating God’s victory and so it is not a huge stretch to say Gaudete Sunday is Snicker Sunday. (To help you remember this day I have provided Snickers® candy bars in baskets. Please help yourself on the way out after service.)

[ ++ When I first say, “Gaudete,” please put the following on the screen:

GAUDETE  
REJOICE  
SNICKER

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Anyway, Gaudete (or Snicker) is taken from the Latin translation of the Scripture typically

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<sup>2</sup>“Joy to the World!” was first published in 1719 but there is evidence to suggest Watts penned it when he was much younger, perhaps only a teenager. Although it has become the most popular Christmas carol in North America, it was not originally intended for Christmas. This means that its message, based on Psalm 98, is that the joy of the Lord is to be shared every day – not just at Christmas.

used this day:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4 NRSV).

We can rejoice in the meaning of the season. What did Adam say to his wife on Christmas? It’s finally Christmas, Eve!

We can rejoice that the Lord has come. We can celebrate that there is such a thing as goodness and that goodness will triumph. It may look bad now, but you know that someday it will change. Jesus said,

“In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 RSV).

This kind of joy is uniquely Christian. Samuel Shoemaker once said that the distinguishing mark of the Christian is not faith or even love, but joy. Jesus said,

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

But many people find it difficult to find joy even, and especially, at this time of year.

[++ 50 sec video clip - How Can I Experience Joy? ++ ]

Much happiness is passive. We wait for the right circumstances to come along. We wait for people to do things which please us.

Joy, on the other hand, is not passive. It does not wait for all the circumstances to line up. It is an action that affirms God’s goodness right at the start.

Our English word happiness gives itself away. The root word is *hap* and it means “chance.” Our culture teaches us that happiness depends on chance, on circumstances. If you are lucky you will be happy but if you are unlucky you will be unhappy.

Biblical joy is independent of circumstances. It is independent of chance. Look at The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). Jesus speaks of profound joy in the context of impoverishment, grief, loss, conflict and even persecution. If biblical joy does not derive from worldly circumstances then it cannot be destroyed by them either.

The Hebrew term for this joy is found in the Psalms where it says,

“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers (Psalms 1:1 NLT).

It has the sense of, “Congratulations, you are on the right track!” The person in Psalm 1 has the right priorities and their destination is assured.

The Greek term for this joy is μακάριος. The ancient Greeks thought this was such a great joy that only the gods could experience it. From a Christian perspective, this joy is a gift that can only come from God. Paul speaks of this as part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

Joy must be strengthened by trial. James says,

“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy” (James 1:2 NRSV).

When non-Christians hear things like this they tend to think, “You Christians must be insane! You need serious help!” Now I agree we need help but not because we believe in joy. For we know that no matter our life circumstances, our Savior is with us. For this we rejoice.

How can joy come from trials? James is not saying that we should derive pleasure from pain or tragedy. Rather, we can have a deep sense of well-being knowing that God is constantly at work in our lives molding and shaping us into the likeness of Christ. We learn to rely upon God more and more knowing that pain and death do not have the final say. Joy is strengthened by trials.

Biblical joy is not an artificial, smile all the time experience. It is authentically human. It knows when to weep (Romans 12:15). But it also knows that there is nothing in all of creation that

“Will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

The words of the prophet have come true. An angel of the Lord proclaims the Savior’s birth. Immanuel has come to us. Rejoice for the Lord is present with us, and with us forever!