

Christmas Eve 2015

Rejoicing

- † In the Bible, the healthy response to Christ and Christmas is rejoicing!

- † Mary was engaged to Joseph. In that culture, you were expected to be virginally pure when you got married. If you were not, under the law you could be executed. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was miraculously pregnant with the Son of God who was coming to Earth, she must have known that this could ruin her marriage plans, even endanger her life. She chose to trust in God, and a little later, she said in **Luke 1.46-50 NET**: **“My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has begun to rejoice in God my Savior, because he has looked upon the humble state of his servant. For from now on all generations will call me blessed, because he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name; from generation to generation he is merciful to those who fear him.”** Regardless of what it might cost her, Mary rejoiced in the coming of Jesus.

- † **Luke 2.8-20 NET**: **Now there were shepherds nearby living out in the field, keeping guard over their flock at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were absolutely terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid! Listen carefully, for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people: Today your Savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a vast, heavenly army appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased!”** [so even the angels were rejoicing!] **When the angels left them and went back to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, that the Lord has made known to us.” So they hurried off and located Mary and Joseph, and found the baby lying in a manger. When they saw him, they related what they had been told about this child, and all who heard it were astonished at what the shepherds said. But Mary treasured up all these words, pondering in her heart what they might mean. So the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; everything was just as they had been told.** The shepherds were glorifying and praising God for the arrival of Jesus.

- † When Jesus was forty days old, his parents brought him to the Temple in Jerusalem for the first time. **Luke 2.25-32 NET**: **Now there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon who was righteous and devout, looking for the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So Simeon, directed by the Spirit, came into the temple courts, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary according to the law, Simeon took him in his arms and blessed God, saying, “Now, according to your word, Sovereign Lord, permit your servant to depart in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a light, for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”**

- † That day, Jesus also met Anna. She was an old widow; she had been married for seven years and then a widow for eighty-four! I don't know at what age she got married, but surely she was over 100 years old when she met Jesus. Luke says she was a prophetess, and **Luke 2.37-38 NET**: **“She never left the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment [when**

Simeon was done talking], **she came up to them and began to give thanks to God and to speak about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”**

- † Sometime later, three foreign men arrived to see Jesus, having discerned from a special star that the King of the Jews had been born. **Matthew 2.11 NET: As they came into the house and saw the child with Mary his mother, they bowed down and worshiped him. They opened their treasure boxes and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

- † All these people rejoiced at the birth of Jesus.

Who Jesus is

- † Why? Why did they rejoice? Because God made clear to them who Jesus is.
 - The angel told Mary she was pregnant with the Son of God.
 - The angel told the Shepherds that the baby was the Messiah-Savior, Christ the Lord.
 - The Holy Spirit earlier had revealed to Simeon that he would meet Christ, the Messiah-savior, who would bring enlightenment about salvation to non-Jews for the glory of Israel, God’s people.
 - The Holy Spirit revealed to Anna that Jesus was the redemption of Jerusalem, that is he would free God’s people from the tyranny of sin and eventually from human tyranny also.
 - The three foreign gentlemen believed Jesus was to be the King of the Jews in the line of David.
 - When they asked King Herod where Jesus had been born, Herod asked his prophets where the Messiah, the Christ was to be born. They quoted back to him a line from the Old Testament, Jewish scriptures: **Micah 5.2 NIV:** [in which God says,] **“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”**

- † That last line brings us back to what the angel told Mary. Because as wonderful as it was that Jesus was born to be the Christ, that is both the Davidic King and the Messiah-savior from God, it is even more wonderful who he truly is: the eternal and divine Son of God come to earth as a person.
 - In the Old Testament prophecies, God sometimes promises a human savior and king, and other times declares that he alone is the savior and king. By the Son of God coming to earth to be born as a human baby, all those prophecies come true: Jesus is both divine and human.

Hope

- † Each year, Dallas Theological Seminary offers Christmas devotions through email. Some of them inspired the thoughts I have shared with you. Now I would like to read to you the devotion Chuck Swindoll wrote.
 - **Galatians 4.4-5 NASB: But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**

- That first Christmas, all eyes were on Augustus, the cynical Caesar who demanded a census so as to determine a measurement to increase taxes even further. At that time who was interested in a young couple making an eighty-mile trip south from Nazareth? What could possibly be more important than Caesar's decisions in Rome, or his puppet Herod's edicts in Judea? Who cared about a Jewish baby born in an obscure Bethlehem barn? God did.
 - Without realizing it, mighty Augustus was only an errand boy for the commencement of "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4). He was a pawn in the hand of God, a mere piece of lint on the pages of prophecy. While Rome was busy making history, God arrived. Reeling from the wake of Alexander the Great, Herod the Great, and Augustus the Great, the world overlooked Jesus the baby. It still does.
 - As they were in Jesus' day, so our times are desperate. Moreover, they often are a distraction from the bigger picture. Just as the political, economical, and spiritual crises of the first century set the stage for "the fullness of time" to occur, so today, in our own savage times, our God is weaving His sovereign tapestry to accomplish His divine will. Times are hard, indeed, but they never surprise God. He is still sovereign. He is still on the throne.
 - Feeling anxious about these difficult days? I understand. Times were no different when Jesus was born. Because so many lives have been turned upside down this year for one reason or another, we need to reflect on what God is doing in our lives. Christmas is a good time to ask ourselves, will I focus on Jesus as the center of my life and cling to Him regardless of the circumstances I face?
 - Political corruption, religious compromise, economic crises—these will always be on the front page. But we must remember that our God is on the throne. He promises to use our desperate times to accomplish His bigger and better purposes all around our world and deep within our lives.
- † So my friends, we gather here to rejoice, because the Son of God came to dwell among us, and to die for us, so that we could have hope.
- We can have hope, because the coming of Jesus proves that God has not forsaken us, because through faith in Jesus and his death and resurrection for us, we can be set free from the power of sin, set free from the influence of evil, set free even from death...
 - Because with Jesus as our savior, we can come spiritually alive to have a relationship with God, and then be with God in Heaven when we die and eventually be resurrected to eternal life with Jesus as our king on a renewed earth.
 - Knowing who Jesus is, we rejoice at Christmas, because he brings us hope.