

**TRILOGY: THE SEARCH FOR CHRISTMAS JOY**  
**"Part III - The BELIEVER'S Source Of Christmas Joy"**  
**(Luke 1:5-64)**

Introduction: (To show the need . . . )

Television show episodes often have closing scenes that idealize Christmas Eve as a night of great joy: on last year's police show of "High Incident", a Christmas Eve theme grips the audience as a mother and father, besides themselves with intense grief, accidentally lose their infant son in a Church. Apparently, a homeless person who had come in to the sanctuary to worship, and who was mentally deranged, picks up the baby and takes it to a special place in the underground sewage labyrinth of tunnels and places it in a makeshift "cave".

In the plot, the police and EMTs hear of this "child" and finally find the baby at the end of the show. The last scene displays a unique nativity "creche" as a young man excitedly holds up the newly found infant, with a strange mix of police, homeless people and EMTs looking on beneath the city streets! It's designed to try making every American shed a few tears "of great joy"!

Don't have everything going just **right**, even as **Christians**, and that on Christmas Eve, we can get **depressed**! Here is a list of challenges believers even in our body at Nepaug have expressed to me the last two weeks that make them admit that it's a struggle to be joyful this Christmas Eve:

Thought of not getting each other **gifts** is a first in their marriage!

(b) Recently, Oma Jean Politz read a mission prayer report regarding missionaries who have been held captive by Marxist abductors for **5 years** -- to the point that their children have trouble remembering them! For the fifth Christmas Eve in a row, they will be separate from their families! How will they have joy this Christmas?

(c) One believer expressed his frustration at his own walk as a believer, that he felt things were not vibrant with the Lord.

(d) Three believers have expressed concerns over lacking full and abundant joy in family, marriage or extended family relations this Christmas season!

**Where can we track down real Christmas JOY in view of challenges to expectations we have that will block "good times"?**

(We turn to the sermon's "Need" section . . . )

***Need: "Even as a BELIEVER, JOY, real JOY seems to be hard to get this Christmas! My own failings or marital needs or challenges with relatives or fellow believers or even the lack of good Christmas trappings to get the 'mood' going right have me feeling blue! It's frustrating because I KNOW it's not 'godly', so what is going ON?!"***

- I. **For EVEN the FAULTY BELIEVER that FIRST Christmas, the SOURCE of JOY was a Gracious, Sovereign GOD:**
  - A. The angel, Gabriel appeared to the priest, Zacharias to announce the birth of a son, John that would bring him great joy, Lk. 1:5, 8, 11-13.
  - B. However, Zacharias **inexcusably failed** to **believe** Gabriel's message:
    1. Zacharias should have **known** Gabriel's appearance was of God:
      - a. To **be** at the Altar of Incense, **aged** Zacharias had to be chosen for this **once-per-lifetime** task, 1:7-9, Edersh., The Temple, 158.
      - b. The **choice** of Zacharias came via **4 elimination** lots, Ibid., p. 157-166, and **lots** were **Biblically** said to be of **God**, Pr. 16:33.
      - c. Since the altar of incense where Zacharias served was the **closest** Zacharias as a non-High Priest **ever** came to the Holiest Place, Gabriel's appearing there signaled he was **God's** messenger!
      - d. The **time** when Gabriel appeared was at the **climax** of **worship** during the altar of incense ceremony, Lk. 1:10, Ibid., p. 167. This fact signaled to Zacharias that the angel was from God.
    2. Yet, Zacharias **doubted** Gabriel's message, Lk. 1:18-19. He was thus judged to be unable to speak until John's birth, Lk. 1:20.
  - C. Nevertheless, God in **grace** enabled Zacharias to speak at John's birth so he could **glorify** God in spite of his failure of doubt, 1:57, 62-64.
- II. **For BELIEVERS in a STRESSFUL MARRIAGE that FIRST Christmas, the SOURCE of JOY was a Gracious, Sovereign GOD:**
  - A. Though upright, Elizabeth's barrenness made her culturally reproached and stressed her relationship with her husband, Zacharias, 1:7, 25b.

- B. However, Israel's gracious, sovereign God blessed them with the birth of John in their old age to remove this social stigma, 1:13-14, 245-25.
- III. **For the BELIEVER'S FAMILY NEEDS that FIRST Christmas, the SOURCE of JOY was a Gracious, Sovereign GOD:**
- A. When the angel announced that Elizabeth would bear John, he said the infant would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb, 1:13, 15.
  - B. Thus, when he was still in the womb, the Holy Spirit caused John to **leap for joy** when his mother, Elizabeth met Mary, 1:36, 41, 44.
  - C. Though longtime **childless**, Elizabeth's gracious, sovereign Lord caused her promised **unborn** son to give her great **joy!**
- IV. **For the BELIEVER'S relations with RELATIVES or OTHER BELIEVERS that FIRST Christmas, the SOURCE of JOY was a Gracious, Sovereign GOD:**
- A. God caused the **believer** Elizabeth to conceive a son (Lk. 1:13), then made her **cousin**, a virgin **believer**, **Mary** conceive Jesus (1:34-36).
  - B. The angel Gabriel then informed Mary of Elizabeth's new pregnancy so the two **related believers** would **meet** with one another, Lk. 1:36-40.
  - C. Then, the Holy Spirit caused them to meet **joyfully**, 1:41-45 with 15b.
- V. **In place of "MOOD TRAPPINGS" for BELIEVERS that FIRST Christmas, the SOURCE of JOY was a Gracious, Sovereign GOD:**
- A. Some may view Lk. 1:42-44 as showing **Mary** to exude a **mystical aura** of joy on Elizabeth as a member of the **original** nativity scene.
  - B. Yet, Mary admitted being God's **female slave** (*doulai*, UBS Gr. N.T., p. 202f) (1:38, 48) who needed God as **her Savior** (1:46f) *who would be called "blessed" because God had done great things for her, 1:48f.*
  - C. Thus, Mary exuded no "aura" of joy on Elizabeth and her unborn infant, for Mary's **being blessed** was caused by **God's grace TO her and TO her people**, Abraham's descendants, Luke 1:50-55.

***Application:*** *The SOURCE of Christmas joy rests BEYOND our faulty selves, our fragile marriages, family, extended family and "mood" trappings. It is GOD HIMSELF, and HIS joy is available to those who (1) believe on Jesus Christ, His Son, for salvation, Jn. 1:11-13; 3:16; Lk. 1:31-33. (2) Then, as did believers that first Christmas, we experience God's joy by being filled with the Holy Spirit of God via (a) confession of sins that create unhappiness (1 Jn. 1:9) and (b) dependence on the Spirit for behavior control (Gal. 5:16-23). In this position, GOD moves us to (c) obey Him (1 Jn. 2:2-6) by singing songs of REAL praise to God (Eph. 5:18-19), giving DEEP thanks to God in Christ's name (Eph. 5:20) and relating well to ALL others -- even the GODLESS or OPPRESSIVE, Eph. 5:21, 22-6:9! GOD'S joy -- not anything WE invent -- then overflows from deep within for true celebration!*

***Lesson:*** *The SOURCE of Christmas joy for us as CHRISTIANS exists far BEYOND all that WE can possibly concoct to produce Christmas cheer! As it was for believers that FIRST Christmas, our Source of JOY is GOD!*

**Conclusion:** (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Following an abdominal operation in a Soviet Siberian prison camp, a young man lay on a rotting bed of straw. He felt intense pain, later described as hot molten led in his stomach, and he exuded an aura of meaninglessness, distrust and hopelessness to the attending doctor.

Conversion to Jesus Christ. He talked all through the afternoon and on into the night, fully aware that he might not get another chance to witness to the youth before dying.

Alexander came to believe on Christ while he lay on that rotting bed of straw in the cold Siberian prison. The joy, peace and sense of meaning that flooded his heart made him realize for the first time that true joy is unaffected by idealism, political or military forces or boundaries. It is found in the heart when one is properly related to Jesus Christ.

True to his assumption, Boris Kornfeld was murdered later that night as he lay sleeping in his bed. A guard clubbed him to death with a plasterer's mallet. The young man, whom we know now as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, lived to win the Nobel Prize for literature. He has also witnessed publically at Harvard University of America's need for spiritual awakening!

True joy does not rise from the "trappings" of Christmas, the externals of even family and extended family and friends that affect how we celebrate it. It rather rises from the GOD of JOY, even for the BELIEVER whose life is threatened in a Soviet Siberian prison camp for doing what is RIGHT.

Our part is simply to focus on our spiritual relationship to the Lord and let the REST of Christmas events, relationships and trappings play second fiddle to THAT!