

Sunday Sermon: December 22, 2019

Sermon Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Sermon Theme: We Have Reason to Celebrate

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

I want to play a game with you this morning. I will bring with lyric for a song and we'll see if you can finish it:

- Deck the Halls.....
- Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells....
- I know it's been said, many times, many ways.....

What about these songs?

- Joy to the World.....
- Hark the Herald...
- Silent Night Holy Night....
-

Those were well-known, but maybe you need a challenge.

- It's the boogie woogie bugle boy from.....
- Somewhere over the
- 1, 2, 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock,

There's something about music? Some of those songs we have heard recently, but others you may not have heard for a long time. Music has a way of hanging around in our minds. Even if we haven't heard a song in years, someone says something, we see or smell something and suddenly the lyrics from that song come back to us.

It's interesting how we can remember lyrics or songs, even though we haven't heard them in a long time. It's an even more interesting when we remember where we were, what we were doing or what we were feeling when we last heard that song.

Music touches our emotions and we often attach those feelings to that song. Maybe it was the pain of a break-up, the joy of a marriage, the happiness of that one summer, or the excitement of high school or college. Even when we remember that song years later we can feel the same things.

Have you ever thought about what emotions Christmas music is trying to touch?

Children love to sing songs like Jingle Bells and Deck the Halls. There are the old favorite hymns with the quiet peace and contemplation of O Holy Night and Silent Night. But the theme of all Christmas music is really summed up in Joy to the World.

Whenever people sing this Christmas music it usually makes them feel joyful and happy. But we Christians have more reason to sing these songs and feel joy. We have more reason to celebrate than anyone else. We have reason to celebrate and to sing with joy because we know that the joy of Christmas is found in Jesus.

There wasn't much joy in Joseph. Joseph was engaged to a young woman named Mary. But that arrangement had fallen to pieces a few days before when it was found that Mary was pregnant. The story that Mary told to Joseph and her family must have seemed unbelievable to them. An angel had come to her and told her that she would be the mother of the Son of the Most High. One who would be the ruler on David's throne. Then God made her pregnant. Unbelievable and what sounded like a terrible, awful lie by a young woman trying to cover something up.

We don't know much about Joseph. But in this account we find out two important things about who Joseph was.

1. He was a righteous man. He believed in God. More than that he believed in the promises that God made to send a Messiah. He was waiting and watching for that Messiah to come.

2. We also learn that he was an upright man who cared. According to the Law, Joseph could take Mary and publicly dissolve the marriage before the elders and officials. If he did that, at best, she would be labeled an adulteress and be scorned by Jewish society. At worst, she could also be taken and stoned for her adultery.

Yet, Joseph was an upright and caring man because what he chose to do. Instead of doing what the Law said he could do, he chose a different way. After he had thought about it, he has in mind to divorce her quietly and send her away so that she could raise the child privately and not be scorned by others.

Then the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and brings him joy and a reason to celebrate. **what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

Joseph had two reasons to celebrate. First, Mary had not been lying to him. She had not been unfaithful to him. She had been telling the truth. But the second reason was an even bigger reason to celebrate. When the angel told him that what Mary had told him was true, he had reason to celebrate. God was fulfilling his promise to send a Savior. This child that Mary would give birth would be the Savior. He would save people from their sins.

The Jews did not have music like we do. They did not have radio stations putting out Christmas music 24 hours a day, CDs that they could put into a player at any time, or Youtube that they could find just about any song ever written on. Yet, they did have something that they heard over and over and over again that they would memorize. These things would come back to them again and again, just like music does for us. They had the prophecies about the Messiah.

The prophecies were the heart of every festival they had. They were read on important worship days, they were read on the Sabbath in the synagogues, they were learned in the synagogue schools. Fathers would have taught these things to their children. They were used so often that a person would know them by heart.

Now the words of Mary together with what the angel said to him would have brought those prophecies to Joseph's heart and mind and given him joy. These words about a virgin birth were ones that the prophet Isaiah had spoken 700 years before this. We heard those words in our first lesson this morning. **...The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.** Matthew tells us that Immanuel means, "God with us."

Even the name Jesus was reason to celebrate. It had significance. Jesus, is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Yeshua. This Greek/Hebrew name means to deliver or to rescue. That certainly fits the mission that Jesus was on to save us. Yet, there is another level of meaning to Yeshua. That name Jesus/Yeshua has the same letters and sounds as the special name of God who promised to save them, Jehovah.

Jehovah was the name of the God of love and mercy. Jehovah is the God who forgives sin and doesn't punish us as our sins deserve. When Isaiah said that he will be called Immanuel, God with us, he was speaking this amazing truth. He even named the God who was with us, Jesus. This child, Jesus, is the Son of God. Yet God would walk the earth among people. He would walk the earth as a person, as we walk. The writer to the Hebrews says, **"¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."** He is God with us to do what we cannot do. He is God with us to stand against the attacks and the temptations of the devil. To walk perfectly because we cannot.

This news of the angel was reason for Joseph to celebrate and for us to celebrate. But so often we are not filled with joy and celebration, especially at Christmastime. Many times in life we don't feel or act very

joyful. Our sins weigh us down. At Christmas, sins of greediness, coveting, selfishness and jealousy are so easy to fall into. Often these sins begin with not being content with the blessings that God gives. These sins show themselves in our thoughts and actions. We are jealous of the gifts that others get that we don't get. Maybe we are frustrated because someone else got what we think we should get. We are unhappy that a new car shows up at the neighbors or someone else got a bigger bonus than we did. It is so easy to fall into selfishness, we want bigger and better so we spend it all on ourselves with not thought of our offerings to the Lord.

We can also struggle with the sin of selfishness with our time. We are so tired from the busyness we have that we have not time for the Lord. Maybe we are going to be so busy with the fun we will have and the gifts we have to open that we will not have time to spend with our Lord.

None of these sins bring joy to our heart. Instead of joy, they make feel more like the grinch. We don't see the joy of Christmas only our own jealousy, selfishness and greediness.

But we have reason for joy this Christmas and every Christmas. That joy is found in the words that brought joy to Joseph's heart. **You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.** We have reason to celebrate at Christmas and every day of our life because Jesus was born to forgive us all these sins of greediness and jealousy and all of the other sins.

God could show his power and glory through wondrous signs written in the sky or on the earth. He could show his love. He could give us anything we wanted anything we desire. He could lay out a banquet for us every day. Showing power and love in that way would be nice, but it would not be reason to celebrate because these would not rid us of our sins.

We would not have reason for joy and hope because we would still have to remove our sins. We would always wonder if we had done enough to take them away.

God chose to show his power and his love in a very different way. He chose to show love and mercy to us. He did not send a judge to earth. Instead, he sent his Son, his Savior, to forgive us. Jesus stepped into this world of sin and suffering to be the answer to sin.

Jesus didn't just happen to fulfill God's plan. Jesus showed the power of God by being willing to walk perfectly for us and to suffer and die in our place. By his perfect life and innocent death Jesus had done exactly what the angel told Joseph he would do. He has saved us from our sins. This is reason for us to celebrate.

In the next few days, when you hear a Christmas song, especially one of the hymns, think about the reason you have to rejoice. Your Savior, Jesus has come to forgive you and bring you joy in that forgiveness.

May God grant us a heart of joy as we prepare for Christmas. A heart that knows the reason it has to rejoice and a heart that sings with the hymn writer:

**14 My heart for very joy must leap; My lips no more can silence keep.
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue That sweetest ancient cradle song:**

**15 Glory to God in highest heaven, Who unto us his Son has given!
While angels sing with pious mirth A glad new year to all the earth**