

The Joy of Anticipation

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[0:00] Welcome here for this Sunday, December 14th, 2025. As I reflect on the bad roads and things, I also think to myself, oh, I had some friends who were in from out of town who were going to come to church today, and I haven't heard from them, but I'm thinking the roads and the conditions probably thwarted their best of intentions, but it is what it is.

So when you think about it today, if you have some time on your own, just think about safety for people who are traveling. We have a busy city and lots of people in our city, and so pray for safety for people as they drive on White Mud or Henday. Pray for safety as people are traveling highways around the city.

We look forward to the warmer temperatures, but then we recognize that it's going to plunge again towards the end of this week. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here. On each Sunday of the Advent season, we light candles in this Advent wreath that you see up front. These candles represent hope and peace and joy and love. And this morning, as we continue in this season of Advent, we're lighting our first candle again, which represents...

Thank you. Our second candle, which represents... Well done, class. Well done, Advent class.

[1:25] We're also going to light our third candle, which represents... Thank you. I'm going to try not to wind up in emergency.

This hand has had enough excitement for one lifetime. Are you wondering why the third candle is pink? You've heard me talk about it over the years.

It's not... Here's my Advent candle joke for every year that I say it. It's not because I ran out of purple candles. Right? I think sometimes...

I remember even as a child seeing an Advent wreath and thinking, What the heck? That makes no sense. But there is a reason. The third candle is pink because it's the traditional liturgical color that represents joy.

The third Sunday of Advent is sometimes known as Gaudete Sunday, which is a Latin word that means rejoice. It's meant to remind us that joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus, to remind us of that joy, but also to recognize the joy that the faithful, all of us here and around the world, have reached the midpoint of Advent.

[2:39] That's where we are right now. And so today we wish for the world to know the promise fulfilled in our King. The Prince of Peace, the wonderful Counselor, we declare reflecting the words of Psalm 40, verse 5, Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders that you have done.

The things you planned for us no one can recount to you. Were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. As we reflect on the wonder and the promise of Christmas, we thank God for all of his promises that are fulfilled through the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus.

And we rejoice in God's faithful love, which brings immeasurable joy. This morning we're continuing in our Advent sermon series, Behold, a Savior is born.

It's this time of year when our hearts and minds begin to shift towards Christmas Day. And it often fills us with joy as we eagerly anticipate the arrival of our Savior, Jesus.

When we started this series, we talked about the hope that fills our hearts when we think about the fulfillment of God's words through the prophet Isaiah. It was written that God would give his people a sign that the anointed one was coming into the world.

[4:08] The wonderful news is that those signs for us, as I mentioned a little while ago, have already come. Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

And we celebrate their fulfillment, the fulfillment of these prophecies, every Christmas season.

The arrival of Jesus, who is Emmanuel, God with us. Today we're going to look at the joy that is ours as we celebrate and anticipate Christ's arrival.

All that that arrival can mean for us and for our lives. And our sermon is titled, The Joy of Anticipation. As you look through the biblical Christmas narrative, nearly all the characters in the story who were waiting on Jesus to be born were marked by joy.

We recognize that they were joyful and anticipating. You'd think they might have been experiencing maybe a sense of despair, though, after hundreds of years, literally hundreds of years, of anticipation that were not fulfilled along the way.

But then just knowing what the arrival of Jesus would mean for them and others filled them with excitement. Are you filled with excitement when you think of Jesus being born?

[5:33] That that's what this time of year is all about. It's easy to forget, I think. So let's be reminded. Joy is found in what will be, not just what is.

Certainly what is can bring us joy, but what is to come can bring us joy as well. And the Christmas account in the book of Luke gives us a little insight into some aspects of the story that the book of Matthew doesn't.

Right? We see that in the Gospels sometimes where there's a bit of overlap and we can see a richer story by looking at more than one account. So we're told that a woman named Elizabeth is pregnant under miraculous circumstances.

And Elizabeth just happens to be the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary goes to visit her cousin and while the two women are pregnant, it's during their interaction that we see joy in a unique way.

So let's read the words of Luke 1, 39 to 45, and you can follow along on the screen if you like or in your Bible. Ready? At that time, Mary got ready and hurried down to the hill country of Judea where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

[6:59] When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear.

As soon as the sound... Oh, it skipped. But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her. As Mary arrives in Elizabeth's home, the baby inside Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy.

Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. So this text that we've just read seems to tell us that the reason for Elizabeth and her baby's joy...

Who's her baby? John the Baptist. Her baby's joyful response is that Mary is carrying the Lord Jesus inside her womb, right?

[8:09] This is resonating with Elizabeth and her unborn child. So just the presence of Jesus being close to them has this powerful effect on everyone who is present in the home.

Then Elizabeth praises Mary for her belief in God. She praises her as well for her willingness to submit to the plan that God would be birthed into the world through her womb.

So when I read this text, I wonder to myself, what is it that she and the baby are so excited about? Well, don't say duh. You're thinking duh, right?

The Lord Elizabeth is speaking about is still an unborn baby. He hasn't done anything yet, right? He's not even arrived yet. So perhaps I think we can learn something here.

What if we can experience joy in our lives today not because, solely because, of how things are now, but because of what the future could bring through God's intervention in our lives.

[9:21] Elizabeth and her child are rejoicing in what is going to result from Jesus' long-expected birth. And so notice what Elizabeth says in verse 45.

Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would, looking forward, right, would fulfill his promises to her. So Mary, Elizabeth, is asserting that Mary is blessed because she trusted, because she believed in something that had not yet come to pass.

It's easy, I think, for all of us to rejoice in something that's right in front of us, right? Yay, this happened. But how often do we think this is going to happen and I'm excited about what's to come. So sometimes just anticipating God showing up, I believe, if we let it, can lift our spirits and encourage us. Connor is exhausted from class so he didn't make it today and it's a bummer because this is something we resonate on.

So his loss, your gain. In this classic TV show, maybe you know it, A Charlie Brown Christmas, a young boy named Charlie Brown was having trouble getting into the Christmas spirit.

[10:38] Maybe you know the story. I cannot go a Christmas season without watching this and The Grinch and a few others. I have a list. So because of his sad little Christmas tree, right, Charlie Brown is bummed.

He's overwhelmed by the commercialization of the season. So his friend Linus, who's clearly a theologian, Linus says, Charlie Brown, you're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem.

But unfortunately, I think some Christians seem to have the same problem as Charlie Brown. Now, stay with me. We should be celebrating what Jesus' life, death, and resurrection means in our lives rather than grumbling and complaining about the things that can be found wrong in our lives or in a season like this.

Is that fair? We can maybe find reasons to be negative or critical, but we can also find the gift of God's presence with us in Jesus.

Maybe you're still waiting on God to do something in your life. Maybe you're still anticipating an answer to a sorrowful prayer. Friends, here is the truth.

[12:05] God is not done yet. God is always on the move.

Whenever we're in his presence, whenever we're walking with Jesus, my friends, anything, literally anything is possible. Just like Jesus' presence in Mary when she was near Elizabeth brought and generated this amazing joy, his presence in our lives can do the same for us.

The shepherds. Oh, the shepherds. They're this other set of really well-known characters in the Christmas story. And I preached about them before in previous Christmases.

They weren't a class of people that were well thought of. Certainly in first century Jewish culture. These folks lived out in the fields day after day watching sheep.

Blue collar. They were smelly, dirty, had a reputation to some of being untrustworthy. For lots of people, shepherds were the dregs.

[13:25] So it's always been very interesting to me then that the message of Jesus' birth comes to them first. You think God has no sense of humor?

Sure he does. Because it does. This important news comes to the least likely audience first. So let's hear the words of Luke 2 verses 8 to 15.

You know it. Luke 2, 8 to 15. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you.

He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

[14:38] Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

In the middle of the night, outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared to shepherds. The Bible says that it was marked by a great light.

And when the shepherds saw this, they were, understandably, terrified. Imagine one of those big helicopters like a Blackhawk, those huge searchlights that they have.

That would be, I don't know, 5% of what they experienced. The entire sky lit up. Terrified? Yes, please. So this was not, obviously, an everyday event, right?

[15:45] This was something miraculous. The angel then brings them this message that is good news. The reason it's good news, maybe you don't know, maybe you do, it's because, and they say this, it will bring great joy to all people.

Not some people, not a select group, but to all people. That's what this news is. And what makes the message the angels bring such great news?

Well, fortunately, verse 11 tells us. They're given reason to rejoice and spread this word that they've been given. Because a savior, not a savior, the savior, the Messiah, defined right there, had come to earth.

The time had come. He is the Messiah, they tell them, the anointed one who has been sent by God himself. So there is joy here.

There's joy in the birth of a savior. Because they needed, and we need, to be saved from our sin and our brokenness. There is joy, because this Messiah, who is the Lord, he is the anointed one, this promised person who would come, who would lead all of us, not with a sword, but with love.

[17:18] So here's your gospel summary for this morning. Here's the good news. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins.

Maybe you knew that. Jesus gave us access to a holy God, his father and our father. Without Jesus, we were nowhere.

Jesus gave us his righteousness and the promise of eternal life. Jesus promised to never leave or forsake us.

Friends, this is good news. I think it's amazing news. And the Bible reminds us that it is for all people.

Jesus isn't just the Savior of some, the Lord of most. God and gave his life to rescue all people.

[18:24] It wasn't just good news for the shepherds then. It's good news for us today. God is good God. This is why we can live with joy and share this good news with others.

The baby Jesus was born and that one fact changes everything. Our celebration at Christmas time only makes sense.

When we consider the season of Easter that lies ahead, right, maybe it's jarring for you to consider those two things as being part of the grander story, but they are.

The birth of Jesus that we've talked about in chapter one and two of Luke are only the beginning of what the Savior came to do. Now I still in my mind have these events separated, and I'm trying not only to teach you that they're connected, but myself as well.

Right? I still think, and maybe it's true for you, Christmas is here, Easter is here, there's a big gap in between, yeah, they're the same Jesus, but we don't always even think of that necessarily.

[19:40] This is a baby, this is a man on the cross, but it's the same story. It becomes clear that later in the Gospels particularly, that what Jesus was born into the world to do was to one day die on that cross for our sins.

The arrest and trial and crucifixion would have been horrific. Can you think crucifixion at Christmas? It's hard. The pain Jesus went through would have been terrible.

However, the Bible says that even in the middle of it, Jesus had joy. joy. How? Why?

Because he knew what was on the other side. Let's hear the words of Hebrews 12 verse 2.

Therefore, you know this well, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Now, pay attention to this next part. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, some translations say author, and perfecter of our faith.

[21:07] For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

we're told that Jesus suffered the cross. He took the shame and humiliation of death because there was joy that lay ahead of him.

What was the joy on the other side of that suffering and pain for Jesus? It was you and it was me. The joy set before Jesus was the fact that because of his sacrifice, you and I would be given the opportunity to receive his gift of grace and experience freedom from sin.

The reason Jesus could have joy in that absolutely darkest time of his life was because he knew that resurrection would be his and ours.

love love and love and love love and love love for joy because of what Jesus would do in saving the world. The shepherds were given good news that would cause great joy for all people.

[22:29] Jesus endured the cross and knew the joy that was on the other side. One of the reasons we enter the Christmas season with joy is because we know that no matter what we're experiencing now, because of Jesus, we have true joy to look forward to in the future.

Sometimes we feel like we may need to feel joyful to be joyful. Can you relate to that? The truth is though that when Jesus was facing the cross, I don't think he felt joyful.

Remember his experiences in the Garden of Gethsemane when he knew what was to come? He wasn't whistling and skipping around the garden. But even though he did not feel joy, he still chose to persevere through difficulty.

He endured the pain to enter the promise. American evangelists and publisher Dwight Moody says it this way, happiness is caused by things that happen around me and circumstances will mar it. But joy flows right on through trouble. Joy flows on through the dark. Joy flows in the night as well as in the day. Joy flows all through persecution and opposition.

[23:59] it's an unceasing fountain that bubbles up in the heart. A secret spring the world can't see and doesn't know anything about.

The Lord gives his people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience with him. Walking in obedience with Jesus means keeping our eyes focused on him as Hebrews 12, that passage we heard, states.

we may be tempted from time to time to wander, to lose sight of where our joy comes from. So I think it's good to have a reminder once in a while like he's given us this morning.

This Christmas I want to challenge you to make a conscious effort to celebrate with joy because of what Jesus has done for you. No matter what's going on in your life today, with family or friends, plan a time to share joy with one another.

This could be putting together a family gathering. Many of you are either attending one or planning one yourselves. Bring some sort of a dish to share, something else to share.

[25:10] Spend time around the table laughing and sharing stories. This could mean inviting a friend over to play board games, sharing with one another the blessings for which you are thankful in your life.

Maybe share joy with someone down the street by taking some baked goods, a card to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Friends, tis the season, as they say, to share the joy of Jesus with others.

Amen.