

Good Tidings of Great Joy

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again. My name is Peter Verhalst, and like you heard, I'm from Brookfield, Wisconsin, live in Milwaukee, as well.

You heard a little bit about me. Maybe one thing you didn't hear here is, yes, we have four adult children, but we are also raising a little six-year-old, and I just mentioned that because the song that we just sang, the chorus is one of her favorites, and so I often hear that coming from the back of the car behind me on our way to school or on the way to grandma or something like that, in excelsis Deo, and she loves to sing that hymn. It's great to be here with you this morning, and it's funny, Andrew, we're from the same area. I know his family quite well, and WEA is a great ministry, and thank you for supporting them as well, and I hope you get to talk to Andrew more following the service today about WEA. It's a great, great, great ministry.

So the topic this morning is joy, and we're not going to talk so much about what joy is as much as the source of our joy, and so I'm going to read or reread a text that you already heard this morning, but it comes from Luke chapter 2, and I'll begin reading with verse 8.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. The 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 of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord, and this is the word of our God. Thanks be to God. So friends, in Jesus Christ, I don't think I need this so much. This fall, we've actually had an experience I haven't gone through before, but I think we've had some animals living in our attic.

[2 : 53] And so we called an exterminator, and we think there are squirrels up there, and I don't know if you've ever been through this before, but this is how they decided to handle it. They put a couple of cages on our roof, traps really, where they thought the squirrels were going in and out, and then they charge you a certain fee for every squirrel. So what happens is if I get a squirrel in the cage, I have to call up and say, Hey, we got another one, and they run out and grab the squirrel, and they send me a bill. And so I had to make a number of phone calls. We got, I think, four or five squirrels in total, but there were also calls because, Hey, the trap is hanging off the side of the roof and all that kind of thing. And there were usually two different people that answered my phone calls. And one of them was always very, very kind and very gracious, very nice. Oh, we'll get somebody out right away. Thanks for calling, that kind of thing. I figured she was either the owner or the owner's daughter, or she was new or something like that. There was another operator who I would call and say, Hey, I got another squirrel. Can you come out and get it? And she was a little more gruff.

Wasn't always thrilled to get my calls that somebody should run out there again. And it just made me think of the old phrase, Familiarity breeds contempt. I'm hearing from him again. She didn't love that too much. Now, anyone here feel a little contempt ever toward Christmas? I mean, if there's anything that we are familiar with, or perhaps even over familiar with, it's Christmas, right? I mean, you probably like me have been hearing all about it since before Halloween. Christmas is coming. Christmas is coming. You may have neighbors like I do who keep their lights up year round, always ready in the twinkle of an eye to turn those things on. I bring you good news of great joy. We've heard it at least twice already this morning. What about you? When you think of Christmas, when you think of that phrase, does it really bring you joy? Does it really bring you joy? Or does it bring you perhaps a little contempt? Like we've had enough of this. J.B. Phillips, the Bible translator, he said once that familiarity can breed contempt, but it doesn't have to. He said, Take good friends, for instance. The better we know them, the more we grow to love and respect them. He said, It's only the people who are fake, or superficial, or filled with deep-seated anger, who disappoint us the

more familiar we grow with them.

But some people, the more we are around them, the more we want to be around them. And maybe Christmas is more like that. That if it's superficial, or if it's all about your circumstances, then perhaps it does breed contempt. But maybe if it's all about a person, a person you know or are getting to know better, then maybe there really is joy in Christmas.

And I think that's where the angel is pointing us today, to a person. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ, the Lord. What I'd like to do with you this morning is just look briefly at the three titles that appear in that verse. The three titles for our Jesus. A Savior has been born to you. He is Christ, the Lord. So first, let's look at that title, Savior.

Okay? And I just want to think about the last two words in particular in that line. A Savior has been born to you. Think about that a moment. To whom has the Savior been born? Well, it seems obvious that the Savior was born to Mary and Joseph, right? They're the ones who just had a baby. But that's not who the angel is speaking to. In our text. In our text, he's speaking to the shepherds, which makes that announcement just a little peculiar.

[7:53] Scott Jose points out that the dative case in Greek, which is what is used here, is reserved for things that come directly to us, directly to someone. It's like those little tags that we put on every Christmas present, right? To Steve from mom and dad, which means that it's not for Roger and it's not for Stacy. It's for Steve, to Steve. That's the dative case. It's specifically directed to someone. Now, let's just think about that a moment. Let's think about birth announcements, for instance. We get them in the mail quite often, right? It's usually quite brief. It's a girl. It's a boy. Celebrate with us. For the most part, they are very generic. They never say, a baby has been born to you. Not even do grandparents get that message. Mom, Dad, a baby has been born to you.

Because Grandpa might respond, no, a baby has been born to you. But she's welcome to visit whenever you come. And why does Grandpa say that? Well, it's because when a baby is born to you, it's a very personal thing. And it changes your life. It means making room in your life. It means buying a crib and painting the spare room pink. It means stocking up on diapers. It means getting rid of that little red sports car and buying a minivan. It means learning how to anchor and unanchor a 75-pound car seat.

When a baby is born to you, it means that your life must change in order to make room for the child. It involves you personally. And that's why the angel doesn't say here, it's a boy. No, he gets specific.

A Savior has been born to you. To you, shepherds. To you, Covenant CRC. To you, Rhonda. To you, Gary.

[10:23] A baby has been born. A child has been born. A Savior has been born to you. It's personal. Because that's the nature of a Savior. You can't have a generic Savior. A Savior has been born.

There's no joy in that. The joy comes when a Savior has been born to you. The joy comes when it becomes personal. When you begin to move the furniture of your life to make room for him. When your habits begin to change. When you rethink your relationships.

When the child gets factored into every single decision that you make. When the Savior is born to you.

That's when the joy comes. When he's intimately familiar. When it's intimately personal. That's when the joy comes.

The second title I'd like to look at with you is that of Christ. The Christ. The Christ is actually just a Greek translation of the Hebrew title Messiah.

[11:49] Both words simply mean the anointed one. The anointed one. And that title refers to the promised and long expected king of Israel.

The son of David. The one who would rule over all of his people and redeem them finally from oppression. The Messiah was someone who could only be waited for.

He could not be manufactured. He was like grace. A gift. A gift that could only be received. And thus only awaited.

Now when I say that the Messiah was long awaited. I don't mean long like you and I tend to think of long.

We think of long as waiting in Chicago traffic. We think of long as standing at the counter of Southwest. And we're trying to figure out why our plane was delayed.

[12:53] Or even waiting behind three other customers in the line at Target. That's waiting for us. That's long for us. The people of Israel have been waiting for God's Messiah for centuries.

That means I'm waiting for the same thing my father was waiting for. And his grandfather. And his grandfather. And his grandfather.

And his grandfather. And you begin to get the idea. This isn't just simply waiting. This is the kind of waiting that you've been waiting so long for something that you've sort of forgotten what it is exactly that you've been waiting for.

And then. Suddenly. The angel says he's here. The Messiah. The Christ.

Like a thief in the night. He's come. How do you hear those words? He's here.

[13:57] Are they good news? To you? A number of years ago. 60 Minutes showed some footage.

And it was of a man who was walking through the African bush. When out of nowhere. From behind him. Comes a lioness.

Bounding up behind him. He never sees her. And suddenly she springs. And takes this guy down. From behind.

Like he were some. Little impala. Or something. And all you can think of as you're watching this. Is I just saw someone killed by a lion. And. But then you get.

The rest of the story. The back story. And it turns out. That. That the lions. Have grown up with this guy. This human being.

[14:56] And they actually consider him. To be part of their pride. And it turns out. This lioness. Is just playing. And it's.

Totally unexpected. It's a total flip. Of the script. You expect someone. To be dying. And it's a game. That scene.

Reminds me. Of Isaiah 35. The context. There is. The Israelites. Are in captivity. And they're aliens. In a very strange.

Place. And so. They're. They're used to being stalked. And pounced upon. By lions. Lions. In the sense of bad news.

And suffering. The news is never good. It's only bad. But in Isaiah 35. The prophet says.

[15:49] That a day is coming. When these very same people. Are going to be pounced upon.

This time. Not by sorrow. But by gladness.

And joy. They'll be surprised. By joy. Maybe you remember the words. Gladness and joy. Will overtake you. Gladness and joy.

Will pounce upon you. And it's a flip of the script. And for centuries. The people. Have been waiting. And in Luke 2.

I think we see the fulfillment. Of that prophecy. Here we have shepherds. Out in their fields. Shepherds.

Who are shepherds? Why were they the ones? To hear the news. I think we tend to romanticize. The shepherd thing. These days. We put shepherds.

[16:47] On our Christmas cards. We like it when our kids. Play shepherds. In the. In the Christmas program. When our boys. Were little.

We even dress them up. Like shepherds. One year. For Halloween. Better outfits. Even when they were. Than when they were little M&Ms.; Shepherds. I think.

We like to romanticize. Shepherds. In reality. Shepherding was. One of the worst. Or the ten worst jobs. Of their time.

Shepherding was a despised. And lowly profession. It was filled by dirty. Smelly. Uneducated. Crude men. They were the dregs. Of society.

In that day. And they were people. Used to getting. Kicked. And stepped on. And pushed to the side. The kind of people.

[17:42] That bad news. Is always hunting. And pouncing on. Well every age. And every society. Has.

Its shepherds. People who know. That the lion. Is lurking. Just waiting. To jump. And they can't. Do a thing about it. Sorry. Your health insurance. Has run out. By the way. You have.

Kidney disease. Sorry. Your car. Is not fixable. Sorry. Your son. Got kicked off. The school bus.

Again. Today. This time. For good. You're going to have to get him. To school on your own. Every age. Every society.

[18 : 34] Has its shepherds. And on this night. They're out in the fields. When with startling. And sudden.

Quickness. The lion leaps. But this time. He's not a killer. This time. He's a friend. It's gladness. And joy. Hurtling out of nowhere. To overtake us. That's why the announcement came. To the shepherds.

Because there are people. In this world. Like the Jewish captives. In Babylon. There are people. In this world. Who are waiting. For the Messiah.

They are people. Who have. Given up. Trying to manufacture. Trying to make. Their own happiness. Trying to manipulate. And control. The circumstances. Around them.

[19 : 34] So that they can find. Some sort of. Happiness. And success. These people. Don't have the cash. Or the clout. Or the stamina. To do it. For themselves.

And so. They've asked God. They've asked God. To bring them joy. They've asked God. To send his Messiah. And they're waiting.

And the angel said. Behold. Today. A savior. Has been born to you. And he is Christ. He is the Christ.

He's the Messiah. Does that sound like good news. To you. Have you been waiting. For the Christ. Have you been waiting. For the gift. Of joy. Or are you still trying. To generate your own. The last. Title.

[20 : 36] I'd like to look at. With you. Is Lord. It's another title. I think that. Produces joy. There's a verse. In the first chapter.

Of James. Is. That goes like this. If any of you. Lacks wisdom. You should ask God. And it will be given to you. Now that verse.

Used to stump me. Because. There were plenty of times. In fact. Many many times. Where I asked God. For wisdom. And it seemed like. I was still. So wisdom deficient.

Like he just. Didn't answer that prayer. Then. Someone. Finally. Explained to me. That. Look. Wisdom. Doesn't come. All at once.

It's not like. 40 years. Of wisdom. Is just going to drop down. From the sky. Right into your lap. Wisdom. By its very nature. Takes a while.

[21 : 34] It takes a while. Wisdom. Is like a good soup. You bring all. The right ingredients. Together. But then. You have to let them. Go through that long. Slow. Slow. Simmering process.

To bring out. All of the flavor. God doesn't promise. Instantaneous. Insight. He just promises. That if we ask. For wisdom.

If we pray. For wisdom. He will set us. On the right road. And make sure. That we find our way home. That we will find it. And I think Christian joy.

Is a lot like wisdom. It doesn't come all at once. It doesn't come. Just like that. It seems.

So many of us today. Are looking for that. Momentary high. Especially at Christmas. We sort of want. Joy on demand. Microwavable joy. We figure that.

[22 : 30] If we have the right people. In all the right places. With the right lighting. And the right carols. And the right food. And the right presents. Then we'll also have joy.

And then we're crushed. When what we thought. Was true joy. Disappears as quickly. As a photo on Snapchat. And all we're left with. Is NBA basketball.

And Christmas afternoon. True joy friends. I think is actually linked. To discipleship. Discipleship. Discipleship. Many of us feel perfectly at ease. Bowing down before an infant. Offering an infant our gifts. But when the infant starts to talk.

And he says things like. Follow me. And pick up your cross. And he says. Seek first God's kingdom. Freedom. Well then we start to get a little nervous.

[23 : 33] Because we're really not looking for a Lord. We're really not looking for a 24-7 master. We're looking for more of a two-way contract. That we can get out of.

Whenever we might feel the urge. Think about our confessions. I believe in Jesus. As my Lord and Savior.

That word believe. Has the very same root. As the words faith. And trust. You may believe in Jesus. That he's a Lord.

But do you trust him. As your Lord. Do you trust that his way. That his words. That his commands. Are actually best. For you. The title Lord. Is a long-term. Kind of word.

[24 : 32] It means from here on out. It means forever more. It means not my way. But his. One person.

Put it this way. It's a long obedience. In the same direction. Friends. Do you. Want.

True. Joy. This is where you'll find it. In Jesus. Jesus. Who is. Our Savior.

Jesus. Who is the Christ. Christ. And Jesus. Who really is. Our Lord. Will you bow with me. In a word of prayer.

Jesus. We. Celebrate. Your. Birth. At this time of year. Father. But Lord. The true joy.

[25 : 33] Comes. Only when we recognize. That you. As our true. And only Savior. We find that joy.

Only when we are waiting. For the Christ. To pounce on us. With gladness. And when we follow you.

As our only Lord. Remove from us. The temptation. To be our own lords. Our own masters.

Remove from us. The. The temptation.

To be our own saviors. And to try to produce salvation. On our own. Rather than waiting. For the one who can truly save us.

And now as we come to your table. This morning. Feed us. Feed us again. On this bread. And juice.

And remind us. Once more.

[26 : 30] That you. Alone. Are our Savior. Lord. And Christ. In Jesus name. We pray. Amen.