

Joy to the World!

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[0 : 00] That's one of the reasons we're so thankful that we start the celebrations of Christmas so early. It takes our mind off things we wish we were more joyful about. After all, the message of Christmas is one of great joy.

That is, after all, what the mighty angel announces to the shepherds in Luke chapter 2, verse 10, which Phil will read to us in a moment. Do not be afraid. I will bring you good news of great joy. That will be for all the people. The birth of Jesus brought great joy to the shepherds. And it can bring great joy to us today. Without wishing to disturb the flow of our lessons and carols in any way, I rather think we would like to ask the angels to explain themselves.

So we can more fully grasp what the joy of Christmas is really all about. So I want to ask these angels who came and announced these things to the shepherds three questions.

First, where does this Christmas joy come from? Where does Christmas joy come from? Listen to the angels as he calls out to the shepherds, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

[1 : 13] What was it about what the angels said which could bring about such great joy? Where does Christmas joy come from? And the answer is, I bring you good news.

If the human race has ever needed to hear good news, it's now because all we ever seem to hear on our tellies is bad news. But 2,000 years ago, an angel appeared to shepherds outside Bethlehem and announced to them genuinely good news.

Now this word good news is literally the word evangel from which we get the old-fashioned word evangelist. Someone who spreads the good news.

An old-fashioned word that sometimes Christians use for gospel. The joy of Christmas does not ultimately come from the gifts that we give or receive, from the food that we make or we eat, from the family time we enjoy.

It comes from the good news, from the gospel, proclaimed by the angel to these shepherds on that dark night. It's the gospel which brings the joy of Christmas.

[2 : 27] That joy Christians may experience not just annually, but daily. And what exactly is this good news? Well, it's contained in the next verse, as Phil will read it to you later.

Today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. It's the birth of a child, and not just any child, but Christ the Lord.

That's where true joy can be found. Today and every day. Not in the world around us. Not even in the tight circle of our family and friends.

But in the birth of Jesus Christ the Lord. Some people think we're crazy as Christians for locating our joy in something that happened 2,000 years ago.

Others think we're crazy about being joyful about someone and something they can't see and can't touch. But that's the way it is for us as Christians. We believe on the basis of historical evidence and the truth of the Bible, that 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, a baby was born who was Christ the Lord, and his birth brings us great joy.

[3 : 37] I wonder if his birth brings you any kind of joy. I wonder if it's good news for you. It certainly was for these angels of heaven, these majestic heavenly beings, and for the shepherds who, having listened to the angels, went and saw for themselves the baby Jesus.

It's been good news for countless millions of Christians over the centuries since that time. It can be that way for you too. Christmas becomes more about a person than about presents, and more about God's gift to us of his son than the gifts we give each other.

Where does this Christmas joy come from? Second question. What kind of joy is Christmas joy? What kind of joy is Christmas joy?

There's many things that can bring us joy at Christmas. Scotland, of course, has been traditionally known for the kind of joy the uskabehe, the whiskey, brings. I don't think it takes a PhD in social science to figure out that Scotland's fascination with alcohol is more of an addiction than a fancy. I'm sure many of us will quite enjoy a dram this Christmas, but it's not the Glenfiddich which will bring us the Christmas joy, as much as it's the gospel. The angel announces good news to the shepherds, the good news of the birth of Christ the Lord, and that good news will bring great joy to all the people.

[5 : 12] It's a different order of joy from anything this world can offer. Literally, it's mega joy. For many of us, when we think of joy, we think of laughter and smiles and happiness, and I don't doubt that sometimes this is what joy looks like, but not always.

Someone may smile on the outside, but sorrow on the inside. Someone might laugh on the outside, but hide tears in the heart. But the kind of joy Jesus brings is so much higher and more mega in every way than we often think it is.

For example, the joy Jesus brings lasts a whole year round. The Christian can look forward to the celebrations of Christmas, not because compared to the rest of the year, Christmas is better. Rather, the joy of Jesus is something we can experience every day. Because the truth is that Jesus makes a difference to our lives all the time.

The birth of Jesus affects us as much on the 25th of June as the 25th of December. But then also, the joy Jesus brings is on the inside.

[6 : 25] Tonight, we're collecting money for Steadfast Global, a Scottish charity which supports persecuted Christians over the whole world. Over the centuries, followers of Jesus have faced terrible, terrible persecutions on account of their faith.

Even today, Christians are the most persecuted group in the world. And yet, whenever you meet a Christian who has been persecuted for their faith, you're struck by their joy.

They might carry scars in their minds and in their bodies, but in their hearts. They're filled with the joy of knowing Jesus. The thing about most of the joy we experience as a society at Christmas is that it's from the presents under the tree.

The food on the table, the programs on the telly. And these are all things which can make us happy on the outside. But only Jesus can give us true joy on the inside. And then, in the third instance, the joy Jesus brings gets better.

It gets better. I know, I think we know that the good times of Christmas Day won't go on forever. Eventually, we'll get sick of the turkey, right? Eventually, the credit card bill will come through, right?

[7 : 43] However, the joy of knowing Jesus just keeps getting better. We used to have an Indian student in our congregation, and when we asked him, how are you, he would say, better and better.

Well, that's the Christian's experience of the joy of knowing this Jesus. Better and better. And the great thing about it is, it really does go on forever. It goes on to the end of our lives, and beyond until finally, we experience joy unspeakable in the presence of Jesus in heaven.

So what kind of joy is this Christian joy? The kind of joy the angels announce to the shepherds out in the fields. It lasts the whole year round.

It's mainly on the inside, and it gets better and better. I'm not trying to sell you anything this evening. I'm trying to get you to listen to what the angels of heaven said to the shepherds.

That there is no greater joy in life than believing in, knowing, and following Jesus Christ. What kind of joy is Christmas joy?

[8 : 52] And then lastly, for who is Christmas joy? For who is Christmas joy? I've got no intention of cutting any further into this service of Lessons and Carols during an excellent job.

Thank you to you all. So I'll close with this third question we want the angels to explain to us. Namely, who is this Christmas joy for? Was it only for the shepherds to whom the angels appeared?

Was it only to the people of Judea living in the days of Jesus? Well, according to the angels themselves, the birth of Jesus Christ and the gospel he brings is good news of great joy for all the people.

Now as far as I can tell, that word all is pretty inclusive of everyone. There's no one here excluded from having the great joy of the gospel except that they should choose to exclude themselves. You don't have to be a Judean shepherd or a religious Jew. You don't have to be morally upright or have it all together. You don't have to have a history, a story in the church. Perhaps this tonight is

your first time in a church and you're thinking to yourself, this place just isn't me.

[10 : 04] It is. Because the angel says it is. The good news which brings great joy is for all people. Down and out, up and out, this is for all of us.

Why is it for us all? Why is it so inclusive that there should be no one excluded from the good news of the gospel except that they should choose to exclude themselves?

It is because of the next verse, as Phil will read, the angel says of that child born in Bethlehem that he will be the savior. The savior. He's been born to save us from our sins by dying on the cross in our place.

To save us from the death that we deserve to die through his resurrection from the dead on the third day. Our Christmas tree downstairs is his Christmas cross.

And our Christmas lights here are the lights and darkness of his empty tomb. The child born to live was also born to die, to be raised again.

[11 : 17] And also that all of us may have great joy in the good news of the Christian gospel. This is good news of great joy which is for all of us. No one is excluded from it except that we should choose to exclude ourselves.

And all we must do for this great joy of Christmas, that joy which lasts the whole year round, that joy which is on the inside, that joy which gets better and better, all we must do for the great joy of Christmas to be ours is to believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, as our Lord, to say in the quietness of our hearts, and believe me, he will hear us.

Lord Jesus, will you be my Lord? Will you be my Savior? and brilliant joy of all that on renew the world?

Who shall remember and eat once again? And also to hear how to frustrate