

Intro: Advent, "the Arrival", is the remembrance and celebration that God has entered fully into humanity in order to fulfill the promise that He made to our first parents. You see, the arrival of the Messiah, the Anointed One, was not merely for a Jewish people, but for all people, because He is the Hero of humanity sent to rescue us from our common enemies: sin and death. For, it was in an uncorrupted garden that God walked with the first man, Adam, until Adam exchanged the uncorrupted life for the knowledge of good and evil and as a consequence made himself an enemy of God. Paradise was lost, and death became our ever-present curse.

Yet, even in the middle of the mutiny and rejection and betrayal of Man towards Him, God made a promise to send a rescuer to crush the deceiver, rob him of his greatest weapon, death, and to reintegrate what had become disintegrated by our arrogance. Eve's offspring would one day arrive to reconcile God and Man, and make all things new.

Long before cathedrals and kingdoms, even before cities and calendars, the sons of Adam were waiting for a deliverer to rescue them from Eden's exile. They knew that they needed a rescuer. They felt death daily, corruption continually. And they also knew the promise, an offspring of Eve was coming to crush the serpent's head, but Abel was murdered and Cain was banished. Beauty couldn't even mark out a single generation before death and dysfunction found the first family in futility. Darkness overshadowed the glories of exploration and exhaustion exemplified the fruitless gloom of the now dangerous night. Generation after generation awaited this promised seed. Would Noah, the remnant, be the one "to rescue us from the work of our hands"? No. Would Abraham, the chosen, be the one to finally return the tree of life to the people? No. Would David, the God-hearted, be the one to crush the serpent's head and reign over the earth? No. So, we waited. Generation after generation anticipated his advent...desperately.

This is the story of God's dealing with Man. It is one story, unchanged and unaltered from the beginning, with two sons, one failing in the garden and losing the tree of life and one promised to slay the dragon and win the girl. It is a story of a war and a wedding, of paradise lost and ages of barrenness, and paradise regained and enhanced because of the barren expectancy of the in-between ages.

And now, here in the gospel according to Luke, we come to the place in the story where the Hero is about to enter, and we find ourselves in an unnamed village in the hill country of Judah, and to two socially marginalized women and an unborn baby. It was to the humiliated and the powerless that God chose to bring his Hero: one woman bearing the shame of barrenness, and one the shame of being young, pregnant, and unmarried, that the Almighty God has revealed that the time has finally arrived for the Hero to be born.

And at the hearing of Mary's greeting, the first response that we are given is the joyful leap of an unborn child. Why this comment? Of all the things that could be mentioned about the story, why did the Spirit of God intend this? Because John is already doing the work of a forerunner, preparing the way for the Hero. And he does so by leaping in joy. Let us learn the great value of this joy today.

JOY Because the Promised Deliverer Has Arrived (Advent)

1. Joy is the Heart's Response to Hope Fulfilled
 - a. John leaps *in utero* when Mary greets Elizabeth
 - b. It is John's joy, but Elizabeth's interpretation of that leap
 - c. this all comes from "being filled with the Holy Spirit"
 - i. harkens back to the promise of John's conception and birth in 1:15
 - ii. John is already acting as a forerunner for the Promised One
 - d. a word about *in utero* personhood

- i. John not only possesses *joy*, but also expresses joy, which results in his leap (at 6 months gestation)
- ii. early non-biblical Christian writings, *The Didache* and *the Epistle of Barnabas* both specifically forbid abortion (Didache 2:2; Barnabas 19:5) and the killing of a child right after birth.
- iii. in the Christian worldview, this before birth (in the womb) and after birth (outside the womb) are equitable as killing

2. What is joy?

- a. This word, translated “joy”, is different than the more common word translated “joy” in the NT
 - i. It is a more intensive, festive, explosion of celebration for something wonderful which was hoped for and has finally arrived
 - ii. *agalliasis* – as a noun
 - 1. Used only 5 times in the NT
 - a. Twice here in Luke 1 (v14,44) and once in Acts (2:46)
 - b. Jude 1:24 and Heb 1:9 (quote of Ps 45:7 of Christ)
 - 2. Used 11 times in the OT, all but one (Isa 51:11) in the Psalms
 - a. Each of these uses have a close connection between a promise and its fulfillment
 - b. Thus, hope is also largely relevant to this kind of joy
 - iii. *agalliao* – as a verb used 11 times in the NT – “extremely joyful or glad”
 - 1. Each has the thread of promise/fulfillment
 - 2. Example: John 8:56 – Abe rejoiced to see Jesus’ day; 1 Pet 4:13 – “Rejoice (chara) to the degree that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may jump for joy (agalliao) at the revelation of His glory.
 - 3. Psalm 126 [SLIDE]
- b. Joy is the response that arises from a heart who feels the weight of a PROMISE and believes in its FULFILLMENT, and walks in hope in the in-between time
 - i. Christmas expectation, the long night, and the arrival of the morning
 - ii. Awaiting a visit from loved ones, the hopeful waiting, and the moment they’re at the door
 - iii. Engagement, hopeful endurance of the in-between time, and the wedding day
 - iv. Expectation of victory in war – struggle – V-Day
 - v. Each of these vary by degrees of significance, or weightiness, but they all end up with:
 - 1. Promise made – expectation
 - 2. Period of waiting – unfulfilled hope
 - 3. Fulfillment – promise kept, good experienced
 - vi. As a result, the joy conducive to each of these also varies by degrees based upon the veracity of the promise-maker, the weightiness of the promise, and the struggle in the “in-between” time

3. Joy jumps to the height of hope expected and to the appreciation of the hope fulfilled

- a. Because joy is based upon the fulfillment of hope, a common view in the world is to stop seeking joy because it’s not attainable
 - i. A lot of studies recently on “the neuroscience of happiness” or “positive psychology”

1. “A huge happiness and positive thinking industry, estimated to be worth US\$11 billion a year, has helped to create the fantasy that happiness is a realistic goal. Chasing the happiness dream is a very American concept, exported to the rest of the world through popular culture. Indeed, “the pursuit of happiness” is one of the US’s “unalienable rights”. Unfortunately, this has helped to create an expectation that real-life stubbornly refuses to deliver.” (Neuroscience News, November 2019)
- ii. Many of these studies conclude that it is not in obtaining the fulfillment of the promise, but merely pursuing a hope which brings happiness
 1. So, it’s not winning the National Championship, but the pursuit of it
 2. It’s not marrying your beloved, but your pursuit of marrying her, etc.
 3. In fact, many philosophers will argue that when a person obtains his treasured hope, it becomes worthless to him – no joy in the fulfillment, only disappointment
- iii. Why do they conclude this? One Reason: corruption
 1. Every time we trust in a promise of joy, it fades away
 2. Petals fall, the Ducks lose, the toys break, the house crumbles, the beloved dies
 3. Therefore, they conclude, the only way to find any form of happiness is to stop looking for it at all.
 4. Hope in nothing. Give your heart to nothing and you can’t be disappointed.
- b. Much of our world is based upon this philosophy
 - i. To deny that we are made for joy
 1. This is a form of detachment – Buddhism is all about this and “joy” is not an element of Buddhism (serenity is)
 2. Don’t give your heart to anything because it inevitably leads to suffering and suffering is bad. The only way to be serene is to not give your heart to any promise.
 3. Naturalism – “Happiness is a human construct with no basis in biological fact or experience. Humans weren’t designed for happiness, they were designed for survival and reproduction.” (Neuroscience News, *ibid.*)
 - ii. Epicurus – an ancient Greek philosopher gave his disciples a 4-step process to ridding themselves of anxiety
 1. Do not believe in God or the gods
 2. Given #1, you don’t have to worry about death – for it is only oblivion the eternal dreamless sleep
 3. Don’t be afraid of pain, for it will soon diminish, or else it will worsen and you will be soon to death, but that’s not a problem due to #1 and #2
 4. Do not attempt to acquire wealth or possessions because you may not attain them, and even if you do they never give the value of what you spent trying to obtain them
- c. There is a half-truth in there, isn’t there? The idols of your heart will fail you.
 - i. If you give your heart to finite and fallible things, you will be disappointed
 1. Created things can never deliver ultimate joy –
 2. My dad and empty Christmas gifts

- ii. The only answer that the world has to this problem is to be blissfully ignorant, or else to join Epicurus and detach yourself from any affection or hope of joy in anything because it is all transient
 - 1. Joseph Epstein, writing on Epicurus states: “My guess is that this program would work. But, even if it did work, would such utter detachment from life constitute a life rich and complex enough to be worth living for? Many would say ‘yes.’ I am not among them.”
 - 2. C.S. Lewis states it better: “Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket- safe, dark, motionless, airless--it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.”
 - d. But Christian joy goes deeper than created things’ fallibility because its hope is on the One who is uncreated and incorruptible
 - i. What we need is a Promiser who is infallible and never dies. One who keeps His promises and NOTHING can make Him unable to do so. Hmm...who could that be?
 - ii. JESUS!! He is the fulfillment of promises made long before and in whose person and work the hope of mankind lay.
 - iii. This recognition of the fulfillment of promises made to Man through the prophets and forefathers long ago led John to react with the joy of a child whose long awaited Christmas morning had come...In fact, it literally had!
4. Christian Joy is “already – not yet”
- a. Justification by faith alone in Christ alone by God’s grace alone – already
 - i. Christianity is the only “religion” whereby one is accepted before any performance has been done – grace secured by God alone
 - ii. In Jesus, we can rejoice because there are historical realities which have already been accomplished – the incarnation of the Son of God and His victory over death are historical
 - b. There is yet a future grace to be experienced – not yet
 - i. Bodies renewed
 - ii. Sin’s presence removed
 - iii. Seeing Jesus face to face (1 John 3:3)
 - 1. We are in the engagement period – the wedding is yet to come
 - 2. But we are engaged!! - Promise made

How Do We Get This Joy?

- 5. See the Significance of Jesus – what baby John did
 - a. When we lose sight of the magnitude of the Fall, of our current condition of corruption, or we lose sight of the magnitude of our hope, the reintegration of all which has been disintegrated by death; then we lose sight of the magnitude of our Rescuer...and lose our joy
 - b. See the magnitude of the danger: Why did we need “God, my Savior”? Why is our joy missing?
 - i. See the bad news: sin brings death on all fronts, wrath, condemnation, hopelessness

- ii. Until you know the size of the debt which Christ paid, then you don't know how grateful to be – and the degree to which you plumb this debt will determine the depth of your joy when you see that it has forgiven
 - 1. Neighbor paying down debt while you're away: how much? How to respond? (D.M. Lloyd-Jones)
 - 2. This is why repentance produces joy, not sorrow or mere regret for the Christian
 - iii. All other problems and dangers seem small compared to this – particularly when you see forgiveness rescuing you – when we see sin as the real danger, the only danger that can truly destroy us – and we see it forgiven completely in Christ – then all our other dangers (financial, health, etc.) seem small and thus we do not lose our joy
 - c. See the present grace: “while you were sinners, Christ died for you” and “justifies the ungodly”
 - i. The gospel is not based upon “get cleaned up” or “be better” or even “do good”
 - ii. The gospel is based upon God's generosity, i.e. grace – while sinners and ungodly and helpless, Christ came and paid down our debt
 - 1. When Elizabeth blesses Mary, she is not creating blessing, she is pronouncing that Mary is already under God's grace
 - 2. Mary didn't merit blessing, God simply blessed her by His sovereign choice, thus she is blessed – under God's grace
 - iii. Thus, in Him, by faith, we are rescued from danger completely
 - 1. “where sin abounded, grace super-abounded” – “how much more?”
 - iv. BUT, we also see what He actually did with our debt – He suffered and died
 - 1. John 16:21-22 – Jesus' suffering and death was like childbirth – anguish, then joy
 - 2. Out of this comes...joy of a baby born!
 - d. Keep our eyes on the future grace that is ours – it is true, though not yet experienced
6. Remember that God Has Given You His Own Holy Spirit to Help You
- e. The down payment of our future glory – the presence of God
 - f. God has poured out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, *whom He has given us!*
 - i. “poured out” is expressing experience
 - ii. As the Feast is in the future, we get hors de oeuvres now
 - g. It was the Holy Spirit who filled John in utero and it was the Holy Spirit who filled Elizabeth to proclaim the Lord's blessing.
 - i. His fruit is joy – as we see the promised fulfilled in Christ and the promise yet to be fulfilled in the future grace
 - ii. We rejoice by faith

Conclusion:

This chapter of Luke's story ends with a blessing pronounced to Mary. It is a blessing “on the one who believes that Lord does what He says.” That is, those who believe that the LORD will do what He promised, that He will fulfill what He has actually promised to do are under God's grace. This is the final word of Elizabeth's "part" in this scene, and it would help inform Theophilus of the nature of faith and that God honors/blesses the one who believes what He says (It may also be a jab at Zechariah on Elizabeth's part!)

If you have lost your joy, and leaping is not a way of life for you or for me, then we have lost sight of one of two things. In the in-between time, in the struggle, in the engagement period, we may have lost the memory of God's past grace to us, of that humbling night when God "popped the question" to a sinner, the ungodly, the whore who is me. Have we forgotten that moment of grace? Have we forgotten the depth of His love? Or, have we lost sight of the future grace? Have we meditated and pondered the promise and fulfillment? I will not leave you as orphans. I am coming again soon to receive you myself that where I am you may be there also. Let me leave us with this promise of the King's Wedding:

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."