

I invite you to open your bibles this morning, to today's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Matthew, the 2nd Chapter, verse 1-10. Which can be found on page ___ in your pew bibles. We continue in our Advent series "The Traditions of Christmas." Today's scripture reveals a lesson of the Joy that comes from Jesus. Mt 2:1-10

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

Think about a time or a situation when things were dark. This could mean things were literally dark, perhaps in the middle of the night when a noise scares us. Or it could be that we felt darkness, such as times when we are frightened and feel alone and hopeless. Now, think of how it feels to have light – either physically experiencing light that breaks apart the darkness or feeling comforted and joyful because our feelings of darkness have ended. How would you describe those feelings? Is joy a word that you would use at this time?

Joy, the overwhelming emotion of inner happiness and peace, that great feeling of delight that wells up from the inner most part of your soul that comforts you. There is a joy that can exceed all possible expectations that can give us the complete assurance that everything is going to be better than it ever was or you could ever expect it to be. Some might ask, how can there be such a joy? It isn't the kind of joy that comes from receiving some material gift during this Christmas season, or the type of joy that only lasts for a short moment from the relief of a bad situation changing into a pleasant one. This joy is the gift from God that can only be found in our savior Jesus Christ, the messiah, the light of the world that was sent to be our Savior, the source of our greatest possible joy. Jesus Christ is our hope for joy in our world.

Unfortunately so many of us get caught up in the hustle and bustle of Christmas that they lose the joy of our season. Christmas is not a time of making money as so many merchants hope, or of getting toys as some children hope. It is a time of celebration of our great king. Worshipping and adoring the one who deserves all our worship and praise. Christmas season is a very special time for believers because they can express what in other times is a hurried thought.

Take a look at today's scripture, in the second chapter of Matthew, the account of the magi coming to Bethlehem. Notice at the end of that very beautiful account, verse 10, when the wise men finally had come from Jerusalem, seeking guidance, they found it. **10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.**

Now think of those wise men, who had discovered from the old testament prophets that no doubt they had access to in Persia, and from their knowledge of the stars, the fact that there was one to come who would be the great king. They had traveled a long time, there was no speedy way to travel from the far east to Jerusalem. But they had traveled that distance, to what they thought was the correct place to inquire about the king, namely the royal palace. However, the king there was a usurper who knew nothing at all about God, much less about any king who was supposed to rule in his stead. But they, having gone as far as they could, now left the king not receiving one bit of information, Bethlehem, a small town, was supposed to be the right place.

As they leave, the star that they saw in the east, and recognized as a prophetic wonder, appeared once again. This time it was in a direction southward toward Bethlehem. They then realized that they were going to get supernatural guidance to the very place. That must have been a great deal to them, for they were walking by faith. They were a long way from home on a journey they had never taken before and they didn't know how to get there.

Now friends, there is a sense in which every missionary is in that very same spot. He is going with a divine purpose to declare the news of the great king. But he doesn't know how to get there, he doesn't know the right place, he doesn't know the exact destination. But there is one great comfort, and that is God knows all of those answers. When a missionary goes, he doesn't go because he is so confident that he can accomplish everything. He goes in faith that God shall accomplish everything he wishes. Some young men and women go out on the mission field, with expectations of accomplishing purposes that they already have. That's usually a mistake because they have to ultimately operate on God's program for God's purpose if anything is going to be accomplished.

Young men who set out to plant a church often times make a mistake that their training is enough, and the techniques suggested in the text books will work. The only thing that works is God. If he plants that church, it will be a good church. If he establishes the work, it will prosper indeed, and there is no substitute for that. This very church in which we worship God in now, was not established because people laid out such careful plans, and accomplished their purposes well.

No, it was because people got together and desired to plant a church according to God's will and were prepared to wait for his time, and for his purpose, and to follow humbly his direction. Every new mission field, every new church must be planted in that same way. It's not that the people involved can do it, because they can't. The people involved must learn how to let God do it. In his way, in his time, and according to his perfect will, and he does it.

Now these wise men were wise. They learned how to submit to God and walk humbly in his pathway, and the guidance they received was supernatural, and it was very exquisite. It brought them directly to Bethlehem, to the humble place that the great king should be born. Contrary to all great expectation, how could a great king be born in a stable. Where there were animals. Where there was no palace or finery. Where there were no servants waiting to attend him. How could that be? Well, it's unique.

Earthly kings live in magnificence. But our great king came in humility to live in humble conditions, to serve others, to die in behalf of his people. There was no palace for him. There wasn't even a decent home. He came not because he intended to enjoy his stay here, but because he loved us, and came to save us from our sins. Friends, that's the meaning of Christmas. It is not a time that we celebrate just to have fun, exchange gifts, and all that attends our celebration. But to recognize how great our savior is and what a tremendous thing he did to leave the courts of heaven, where indeed he had the praises of men and angels. To come here, to a poor place, and a poor land, and live in what we would consider to be wretched conditions to accomplish the salvation of his people.

Infinite love is involved, love vastly greater than all our sin. That he took upon himself to deliver us and to bring us ultimately into his presence. What a marvelous savior we have, what grounds we have for singing his praises. Celebrating and declaring how great he is and humbly making ourselves available to him that he might use us to be a blessing to others.

Now friends, we can well afford to meditate on joy, Christmas joy, because it all comes from him. We don't manufacture it. In Psalm 16:11 the psalmist says **11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.** Now here is the right biblical attitude.

Some people are pleasure crazy, they're here in this world just to have fun, have a good time and if anything derails that purpose they're crushed. But that's not why we are here. We're not here just to have a good time. We're here to serve the great king, and that declaration by David tells us exactly where our ultimate joy is to be found. It's going to be found in the presence of Christ. Now ultimately that means one day we shall be in his presence in that celestial realm and our joy shall be perfect.

But here is not perfect, and we do have joy, and there is blessings in serving God, but often times it is tempered or filled with the cares of this life, and sometimes genuine sorrows. That is life in this world. It is never unadulterated joy, it can't be. Because it's not heaven yet.

But the place that he is preparing for us will be one of supreme joy. There will be no enemies, there will be no temptation, there will be no sin, there will be not a single adversary. The Lord will reign in triumph and his people shall be joyful. That is his purpose all along, and that's why he came to earth to suffer and die on the cross, that we might be able to be joyful forever. What a marvelous savior we have.

What an astonishing king who would sacrifice himself for his people. There's not another one in history, all human kings expect people to serve them. They all expect to be protected from everything by their subjects. But here is a king who gives himself for his subjects and dies on their behalf. That is unique in the history of the world. It is our great king. How wonderful that we can serve such a great king.

In Ps 42:4 *These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.* The psalmist expresses here earthly worship, worship of the true God, in which he came with a voice of joy and praise celebrating how great his God is. That's our purpose, as we assemble here today. Not to have fun, we come to sing his praises, who provided for us such great salvation, who blesses us with such eternal gifts, who delights in giving himself to his people. So we too can celebrate with joy and praise, as the psalmist did in his day because of the work of that great king.

Ps 43:4 *Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my exceeding joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.* Yes, God is his exceeding joy, his joy wasn't found in things, in earthly pleasures. It was found in the presence of God himself, his exceeding joy, that must be our focus. We must tend, not towards the worldly things, but towards the celestial things. He is our joy, he is why we celebrate, he is the one who gives us Christmas joy.

In Ps 51:12 David expresses the joy of the penitent, on forsaking his sin, where he says, **12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.** David understood that he couldn't trust in himself, that he wasn't strong enough to stand the temptations and tests of life, and he sought strength in God and found it. In this psalm, it is a psalm of restoration, and rededication to God, and he asks for a restoration of joy.

Yes, believers can lose their joy. They can for one reason or another become so entrapped by the devil's snares that their joy is gone. But that shouldn't be, it should be corrected. All of who may become sorrowful for what ever reason need to forsake this sorrow and turn our attention instead upon the one who gives us joy. Who causes us to rejoice. Our savior can put joy in our hearts and lives. Sometimes he is the only one who can do that.

In Luke chapter 2, verse 10 we see joy in another Christmas context. In this verse an angel addresses the shepherds in the field, and he says to them **"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.** Now here is the source of joy, this is the joy that can never fade, can never pass away because this is the means of our salvation. The angel describes here to the shepherds that joy of the birth of that great king. It's significant that this announcement is made not to pharoses but to shepherds, they were a humble and despised group, they dealt with animals all the time. To the pharoses that meant they were unclean. They turned up their nose at them. The angels sought them out.

Now this is very significant, God seeks out the humble and the lowly, and he is prepared to impart joy to those people that have nothing else to be joyful about.

But these shepherds found the great king because they were singled out for special favor by the angelic host. Isn't that amazing, when the king was born, the most important people were the humble ones who appreciated that news the greatest. They weren't the rich and the powerful for they had their own joys. But here the joy God imparts is to those we would consider lacking joy.

The shepherds go to Bethlehem, and they find that house, and they come to worship the great king. When we think of the house that the Lord was in, we tend to think of something like we live in. In Palestine in the first century, think in terms of a one car garage. Your thinking in terms of the size of the house, now you understand what the house is. It's the place where they lived, it's the place where the food was fixed, it's the place where they slept, that was it. We tend to think in terms of a mansions in the light of the ancient world. But in the ancient world the house was a small place. Everybody lived together in that house, a small room filled with people. We live in terms of luxury these days, back then they knew nothing of that.

We must recognize that joy does not depend on outward circumstances. It doesn't depend on the type of dwelling that you live in, or the kind of circumstances that surround you. We can thank God for the blessings and for the benefits that he has given us. But they don't give us joy. Joy comes from God. Joy comes from inside because it comes from a right relationship with God, of walking with Christ, learning to serve Christ, humbly following his pathway.

Circumstances can't take it away from you, it is yours because he desires you to have it. What a blessing that is.

That is where the joy is found and it's a supernatural thing that doesn't depend on outward circumstances pleasant or ill, it depends on your relationship with Jesus Christ. Christmas joy is a most precious thing, because no one can take it away from you. What ever the circumstances, whatever difficulties you may face, the joy of the season can be there and you can celebrate in your heart how great is that king that you worship.

Isn't that a blessing? Every person on the face of the earth can be joyful, because it's joyful in Christ. It is the joy of the Lord. Not a joy centering in circumstances, not a joy centered in things, it centers in the Lord and no one can take that from you.

Christmas joy is a wonderful precious thing that we should thank God for and indeed rejoice in his presence and receive the blessing of joy from him because ultimately that's where it comes from.

In John 17:13, in the upper room, the Lord Jesus prayed, that believers might have his joy in themselves. "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

What a tremendous thought that is, that he prays that we will have joy, but not just any joy, not even human joy, he prays that we might have his joy. What is that? The joy of the Lord Jesus. The joy of being one with his father, the joy of serving his father perfectly, the joy of living for others, he is the perfect manifestation of all this, and he prays that this joy will be ours. What a marvelous thing! That we can have the joy of fellowship with his heavenly father. That we can have the joy of his presence.

For Jesus said “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” We can have the joy of serving him. Doing what we are doing to his glory, and to his honor. We can have the joy of helping others, and being a blessing to others, even, as **He** lives and exists.

He does not live in solitary splendor as the king of the universe, he lives in the midst of men and angels, and his love pours forth to all his people, even to us in this place. We can have joy because he has joy. He loves to serve his father, he loves to accomplish the will of his father, he loves to sustain those who desire those same things. He loves to accomplish his will through his people. He loves to impart his joy to you. How wonderful is the Christmas season. Christmas joy comes from being with Jesus, meditating upon Gods word, letting his word permeate our beings to make us what we should be for him.

We should be a joyful people, not just at Christmas time, but at all times, because his presence never leaves us. If you know the Lord Jesus as your savior he abides in your heart, permanently dwells there, his spirit is the agent of his indwelling, and the Holy Spirit of God supplies you with that joy and peace that only comes from him.

The world doesn't understand the Christmas season at all. They think it's a time of getting, get this, get that. They don't understand what its all about. But if you know the Lord Jesus as your savior you do understand what its all about. It's a time of coming before him, learning to dwell fully in his presence, filling your thoughts of the words of scripture, the Christmas story, the love of God for you.

That's what gives us the joy, the peace, that is the Christmas joy and the Christmas peace. We have a great privilege of living in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Of walking humbly with him, of letting him guide our steps, and guide our thoughts, and guide our hearts, into constant loving fellowship with him at Christmas, and every day of the year. He doesn't want us to come before his presence just once in a while, he wants us there all the time. He wants us to learn how to live in his presence, to think about this blessed book, all the time. To let our minds dwell on how great his love and grace is. The Christmas season is a wonderful time to begin, but friends, it should never end. Not in this world, and never in the world to come. Our hearts should be with him, the Christmas joy should be there every day because he is there, and we should learn to walk with him. To give him the worship and the praise and the service that he deserves.

Most Loving Heavenly Father,

Thank you for sending our Lord Jesus into this world to be our light,

to be our supreme source of unending joy.

Forgive us that we have become distracted,

and forget you, and forget your word.

Cleanse us from such infidelity, Help us oh Lord,

that we may learn to live in your presence.

To walk with you, humbly, every day seeking your presence,

and your guidance, and your sustaining grace.

Lay your word upon our hearts, help us to meditate in scripture,

Help us to live according to your word.

Lord, by your grace, lead our steps day by day,

guide us in that pathway of your will for our lives,

Help us to think of you, and walk with you,

and love you from the heart as we should.

Give us grace to these ends,

that the Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified through each one of us.

We pray in the name of the risen King Jesus

AMEM