

## **A pathway to joy this holiday season and beyond**

### **December 2006**

*"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."*

*Luke 2:10-11 NIV*

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Phil. 4:4 NIV*

It will not be long and most of us will be shopping, decorating, cooking and attending holiday get-togethers as we prepare for the Christmas season. Our usual American traditions will have much of our attention and focus. A challenge we face as followers of Jesus is to celebrate His birth without getting so caught up in the hustle and bustle that we miss out on the joy that is supposed to be ours as we worship the King born in Bethlehem.

Throughout the story surrounding Jesus' birth this response called joy is seen rising in the hearts of those we are introduced to. Mary, the mother of Jesus, sings for joy in response her cousin's declaration that the baby in her womb leaped for joy when she heard Mary's greeting. The angels announced the good news of great joy to the shepherds who were watching over their sheep. The wise men were "overjoyed" when they left Jerusalem for Bethlehem and the star they had been following –continued to lead them on their way to worship the child-king.

Joy flavors the story of Jesus' birth, and joy is to be a characteristic of those who call Jesus' Lord. It is the overflow of God's grace in our hearts.

So how can we experience God's joy throughout the holiday season –let's look at two examples from those I mentioned to show us a pathway to a joy-filled Christmas celebration and a lifestyle of knowing His joy.

The wise men show us that to know our Master's joy we seek Him as a life's posture. We were created to know Him, and by aligning our hearts with this purpose, we will come to know His joy. The wise men also show us that extravagant worship will result in experiencing His joy. They gave the child king lavishly expensive gifts, but it wasn't the price tag that brought them joy, it was that their gifts represented their best. When we love someone, we often purchase gifts that reflect our desire to tell them how much they mean to us. Again, price doesn't matter except that whatever we spend on a gift represents a desire to lavish love upon –to express how much they mean to us. Loving God lavishly we result in a heart full to overflowing with His joy.

Mary, Jesus' mother, knew the Father's joy through her yielded-ness to His plan. Yielded-ness is a form of worship; of giving back to God –which always results in knowing His joy. It is the same sense of joy we feel inside when a special person

receives and opens a gift chosen to lavishly say, “I love you.” We see their joy, and our hearts are filled too! Mary declared in response to the angel’s announcement, “*May it happen through me just as the Lord has said.*” Somehow Mary caught a glimpse of God’s grace in the midst of receiving this news and later when she went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. After Elizabeth loudly exclaimed how the baby in her womb leaped for joy at the sound of Mary’s greeting, Mary broke into song praising the virtues of a Savior God. Her joy flowed from an overflowing heart of gratefulness for God’s mindfulness toward her, and as she had come to understand –for all humanity. God knew our desperate situation and chose to enter into our experience in order to provide what we could never provide on our own –amazing grace!

Joy can be ours this holiday season and throughout the year. We can know His joy as we seek Him as our life’s purpose; by giving Him our best; by yielding to His plan; and by letting the truth of His mindfulness toward our personal situations settle into our hearts.

Our Master desires for us to know His joy along with all its benefits. His joy will bring peace, hope, gratefulness, and a song in our hearts. My favorite Christmas carol says it like this, “*Joy to the world, the Savior reigns. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare Him room. Let heaven and nature sing. Let heaven and nature sing.*”