

CHRISTMAS JOY AND HAPPINESS

Rev. Norman H. Reuter

Why is it that the coming of Christmas fills us with so much joy? Why do we gladly start getting ready for Christmas when the time comes? Why are we always ready to practice Christmas songs and to learn our Christmas recitations? Have you ever thought of why you like these things? Maybe you would simply answer that it is because you just enjoy them, and that you like to do them because they bring you joy and happiness. For we always love to do the things that give us pleasure.

Where does this pleasure—this joy and happiness—come from? It doesn't just come out of nowhere, like a breath of wind. We all know that joy and happiness are very real things, things we feel, and so we know that they exist. And if we think a moment, we will remember that all joy and happiness come from heaven. They come from the presence and nearness of the angels. This is true of Christmas joy as well as of any other joy or happiness which we may feel.

In the years before the Lord was born there wasn't much joy and happiness on earth. Instead, there was much evil and many wars in which people were killed or suffered a great deal. Very few people knew about the Lord, and fewer still believed in Him. And those few who did know, and did believe, were filled with sorrow, because they longed for the Lord to come on earth, as the prophets had foretold. Some people began to lose hope that He would ever come. So you see, there wasn't much happiness on earth in those days just before the Lord was born.

But there was a place where there was great rapture and rejoicing, and this was in heaven. The angels, especially the wisest of them, knew that the Lord was about to come on earth. They knew that He was preparing to "bow the heavens, and come down." Therefore, they were exceedingly happy, for they knew that He would be able to save all people and make them happy like the angels. They knew that He would bring "peace on earth, and good will to men." They knew that those who had waited so long, who believed in the Lord's coming, were soon to be rewarded.

Just like people, when angels have good news, they like to tell it to others, so that they can share in the happiness. So the Lord allowed some of the angels to appear to some people and tell them that He was about to be born. In that way the people would know who He was when He came and be prepared to greet Him.

But the angels could only appear to those who loved and believed in the Lord—those who still hoped and looked for His coming. One of these was Mary, and so the Angel Gabriel came to her and told her that she had been chosen to be the mother of a Son who would inherit the throne of His father, David. He told her that she was to be the mother of the Lord Himself, because He was going to be born as a little child. But Mary wondered how this could possibly happen. Then the angel told her that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

Mary did not doubt the angel. She believed, and, believing, she was filled with great joy and happiness. Then, like the angels, she wanted to tell the glad tidings to others. She could not keep the good news to herself. She felt that she must seek out her cousin, Elizabeth, and share her newfound happiness with her. And we can imagine the intense rapture, the great joy, with which she uttered that song beginning with the words, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” Elizabeth, too, was filled with happiness, and said to Mary, “Blessed are you among women” (Luke 1: 42,46,47).

Not only did the angels appear to Mary, but in the Word we are told how they also appeared to Joseph, to Elizabeth, to Zacharias, to the shepherds in the field, and even to the wise men far away (for the star which the wise men saw was a society of heavenly angels telling them where to go). And so the joy of the angels overflowed into the world and reached those people who would be happy because the Lord was coming.

It is the same with us today, whenever we celebrate the Lord’s birth. When we read the stories about Him in the Word, when we sing Christmas songs, when we prepare for and celebrate Christmas, the angels are again filled with joy and happiness. And, if we love and believe in these things, they can draw near us and fill us with joy, as they did with Mary and Elizabeth and the shepherds. We may not actually see the angels, as Mary and the shepherds did, but we can feel them near us, for the joy and happiness we feel is from their presence, from their nearness to us. The angels’ joy comes right from the Lord, and they pass it on to us, and thus the Lord fills us all with peace and happiness.

When we know about the wonder of the Lord’s coming on earth to save all people, and the great joy of the angels because of His coming, we too are moved to sing with the heavenly host that appeared to the shepherds. We too can praise God, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

Amen.

Lessons: Luke 1:26-38; *Apocalypse Revealed* 743 or *True Christian Religion* 82