

Weekly Reflection – Advent: Joy – “The Face is the Key.”

#### **Luke 2:1-14**

Listen again. ***“And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” (Luke 2:10-12 ESV)*** In all the history of the world, no greater news had ever been proclaimed than this—that God Himself had taken on human flesh to be our Savior. Think about it. There could be no greater news than this.

Imagine the feeling you get when something you've been waiting for and wanting, out of the blue, comes to pass? The greatest news proclaimed in the Old Testament is that a Savior, Christ the Lord is coming. That is the greatest news in the Old Testament. And it is very good news. But now an angel of the Lord gets to proclaim something even better. That “Savior, which is Christ the Lord,” is now here. The news is no longer, the Savior is coming, the good news is now, the Savior is here, He has arrived.

And we know this news is for each of us, because the angel says so. “I bring YOU good news...” But maybe you're thinking the angel was talking to the shepherds not to us, right? Yes, but the angel goes on to tell the shepherds that this good news of great joy is “for all the people.” And certainly, each one of us fits into the category of “all the people”. So, this good news of great joy is for you.

#### Does my life reflect this great joy? Am I living in this great joy?

- “Joy is the twinkle in someone’s eyes, the smile from deep inside, the gladness that makes lovers run toward each other, the smile of a baby, the feeling of sheer delight that grows stronger as people who love each other lock eyes, what God feels when He makes His face shine over us, and the leap in our hearts when we hear the voice of someone we have been missing for a long time.” (From the book *Joy Starts Here*)
- In other words, joy is what you feel when you see in someone’s face “I delight to be with you.”
- It has been discovered that God has designed our brains to run on joy like a car runs on fuel. Our brain desires joy more than any other thing.
- Your joy center is located behind your right eye. Its technical name is the right orbital (as in the right eye) prefrontal (as in the front of your brain) cortex (the outermost layer of our brain where our highest-level brain function occurs). This part of your brain is largely undeveloped at birth, but it grows to become the captain of the emotional command center in the brain.
- As we go through our day, our right brains are scanning our surroundings, looking for people who are happy to be with us. God designed facial recognition circuitry into our brains and linked it to our joy center. For example, my wife’s face lights up when she sees me, and this initiates a joyful chain reaction in my brain that I can feel in my body.
- Brain science reveals that this joy sensation is crucial for emotional and relational development. Our brain looks specifically to the face of another person to find joy, and this fills up our emotional gas tank.
- The face is key.
- God designed our brains to seek joy through eyes and facial expressions, through being with people who are glad to be with us.

#### The face of God brings joy.

- *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance (face) upon you and give you peace.” Numbers 6:24-26 ESV*
- *“Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face,” (Psalm 89:15 ESV)*
- *“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11 ESV)* The original Hebrew renders this verse, “abundance of joy with your face.”
- *“For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence.” (Psalm 21:6 ESV)* The Hebrew reads, “You make him happy with joy with your face.”

It seems that there are two primary pieces to growing in joy, to living lives of joy: First, there needs to be people who are glad to be with us, and second, we need to be with those people, face to face.

### Christmas.

Why or how is this good news of the Savior coming supposed to produce great joy in us? Christmas contains both of the ingredients for joy, God delights in us, and God made a way for us to be with Him. Let’s think for a minute, “What does it mean that God the Father sent God the Son to be born in a manger, to become flesh like us, to save us?” One of the things it means is that God loves humanity and wants to be with us. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 ESV)*

- But do you ever find yourself feeling that God merely tolerates you? Yes, He truly loves humanity, and that’s why He puts up with you?

### God delights in you.

- *“He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me.” Psalm 18:19 ESV*
  - God sent His Son to rescue us because He delights in us.
- *“The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” Zephaniah 3:17 ESV*
  - C.S. Lewis – “To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son – it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.”
- *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32 ESV*
  - The Father does not begrudgingly give His children the kingdom.
- *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” John 14:3 ESV*
  - Jesus did not come and die to stick us in some remote corner of Heaven, He came and died because He wants us to be where He is.
- *“I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.” Jeremiah 32:40-41 ESV*
  - To become more joyful people, we must rediscover the weight of His smile toward us.

- “*For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*” *Isaiah 62:5 ESV*
  - “*How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights!*” *Song of Solomon 7:6 ESV*
  - These words describe Jesus’ thoughts toward His bride as He beholds her.
  - In turn, the bride boasts, “*I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.*” *Song of Solomon 7:10 ESV*
  - The meaning here is, “He runs after me with delight. He chases me because I am so precious to him.”

Christmas contains both the ingredients for joy, God delights in you and God sent His Son to make a way for us to be with Him, in His presence, to see His face.