

Sermon: *Joy's Light is Shining*
Text: *Isaiah 9 and Luke 2*
Date: *December 13, 2009 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

Did you hear about the letter to Santa? It said:
"Dear Santa, there are three little boys living in our house. There's Jeffrey; he's two. There's David; he's four. Then, there's Johnny; he's eight. Now, Jeffrey is good some of the time and David is good some of the time, but Johnny is good all the time. Love ... Johnny."

You know, the Grinch did everything he could to stop Christmas from coming. He took away their trees and decorations; he took away their gizmos and gadgets; he took away their presents and prizes; he even took away their festive meal ... but he couldn't stop Christmas from coming. And on that Christmas morning, the Whos down in Whoville filled the air with Christmas joy and that's when the Grinch had a thought ... *"Maybe Christmas means more."*

This week, our family went shopping and through the wonder of cell technology, the kids went in one direction and Lori and I went in the other. And as we went along, I saw a little girl; she had her nose plastered to the window, looking at a Nativity Scene. She said: *"Look, mommy; it's Mary and Joseph and Baby Jesus."* And mama grabbed her by the arm and snatched her up and said: *"Come on, Sara. We don't have time for this."* And I thought about the Grinch: *"Maybe Christmas means more."*

Why do we get so stressed out about Christmas? Most of us start out with good intentions. We just want to have a good time, to see the sparkle in the eyes of our family and friends, to do something that's

a little extraordinary. But somehow we get so busy and so stressed and then, Christmas becomes a time of gloom and doom. And by the time it gets here, we just want it to be over.

It was a time of impending gloom and doom for Judah. The Assyrians had destroyed Israel and now, the Babylonians were threatening Judah. Isaiah said they were the instruments of God's judgment. But in the midst of the gloom and doom, Isaiah said: **"There will be no more darkness for those who were in trouble ... the people walking in darkness have seen a great light. For those who lived in the land of deep shadows, light! Sunbursts of light! For you repopulated the nation; you expanded its joy. Oh, they are so glad in your presence! Festive joy, the joy of a great celebration!"**

Israel wasn't the most joyful place in the world. They lived under Roman oppression. Their economy had tanked and their taxes were high. And when they turned to their religious leaders, they were met with another burden. You see, in Israel, you had the "haves" and the "have nots" and shepherds were definitely among the "have nots". They were Bedouins, living among the sheep. Nobody respected them; nobody trusted them; and nobody really wanted them. Then, one night, on a hillside outside Bethlehem, a group of shepherds had their lives forever changed by angels who appeared with a wonderful message: **"Behold, I bring good news of great joy for you and for everyone for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ, the Lord."**

Good news of great joy! Even in the midst of our stress and exhaustion, Joy's light is shining. We just need to put ourselves in a place where it can shine on us. Now, how do we do that? How can we have a joy-filled Christmas? Well, I have three suggestions:

First, Give Your Worries to God! I Peter 5 says: "Cast all your anxiety upon Him for He cares for you." Now, there is a lot of anxiety in our world. We really don't know what the future holds. And to some extent or another, we all battle the *What If Syndrome*. "Well, what if there are more terrorist attacks?" "What if the economy doesn't rebound?" "What if I lose my job?" "What if things don't go well at the doctor's?" "What if they don't like the gifts I bought?" "What if they don't like the way I've decorated?" "What if they don't like the food I've cooked?"

There are many "what ifs", aren't there? And it's the "what ifs" that rob us of Christmas joy! So Paul reminds us: "Rejoice in the Lord always ... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition present your requests to God."

Give your cares to God and joy's light will shine upon you.

Second, count your blessings! It doesn't make sense to fuss about having a half-full glass in a world where people are dying of thirst. And when you stop and think about it, we're blessed! The poorest person listening to me is richer than 95% of the people in the world. We're blessed!

And yet, someone said to me: "*Tucker, it just doesn't seem like Christmas, because I don't have money to*

spend like I used to.” Listen friends, Christmas is Christmas even without the presents. As I’ve thought about the holidays, I’ve thought: “How’s it gonna feel like Christmas without daddy?” And suddenly, it hit me; I was focusing on what I didn’t have instead of what I do have. I still have my wife and kids and the best mama in the world.

Maybe Christmas means more than what I don’t have. Moses promised the people of Israel: **“All these blessings will come to you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: you will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb, the crops of your land, and the young of your livestock will be blessed.”**

Count your blessings; take note of what you have and Joy’s light will shine upon you.

Third, remember the rhythm of life. Exodus 20 says: **“Remember to observe the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest, dedicated to the Lord your God.”** You know, God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, not because He was tired, not because He needed the time off, but as an example for us. We were made for work and rest.

Now, in our culture, we are preoccupied with activity. We’ve got to keep going; we have things to do and people to see and then ... Christmas comes and there’s even more people to see and more things to do and life gets out of synch. Our rhythm of activity and rest, work and worship, is thrown out the window.

No wonder we're so touchy, no wonder nobody can talk to us without hurting our feelings, no wonder we start biting people's heads off.

Here's how Job described the busyness of his life: "*My life passes more swiftly than a runner. It flees away without even a glimpse of joy.*" Wow! That describes us, doesn't it – especially during the holidays. But oh how different things would be if we remembered the rhythm of life and took a little time, time to reconnect with God and ourselves; time to rest from work and sometimes even from recreation.

Remember to keep the rhythm of life and then, Joy's light will shine upon you.

Now, what would it take to make you happy? I mean really happy! *More money?* Well, that's what Jack thought ... until he won \$315 million in the lottery. Since then, he has been arrested twice and ordered into rehab. *How about less weight?* That's what Cindy thought ... until the cosmetic surgery went wrong. ... What is it? What do you need to make you really happy? Friends, may I suggest to you that what you need to make you really happy isn't a present or a party, but a Partner, a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ and the light of His Joy is still shining this morning. Won't you put yourself in the place where it can shine on you?

Shine, Jesus shine fill this land with the Father's glory.

Blaze, Spirit blaze set our hearts on fire.

Flow, River flow flood the nations with grace and mercy

Send forth your word, Lord and let there be light.