

# “Good News of Great Joy for All People”

*Luke 1:5, 2:1-4, Isaiah 9:2, Matthew 4:16, Acts 26:18, & John 1, 8:12*

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Christmas is good news of great joy for all people.

Luke begins the Christmas story by acknowledging that the world is a mess writing: Luke 1:5 **“During the rule of King Herod...”** Herod was a ruthless, murderous, oppressive dictator. Luke tells about a faithful weary priest, Zechariah, who became hopeless until the awe of his son John enabled him to perceive the good news of great joy for all people. Luke tells of Mary and Elizabeth weary from shame who connected with each other, named the pain of their shame, let shame go and moved on to the good news of great joy for all people. Mary and Zechariah sustained their hope by singing.

In chapter two, Luke notes the misery of the world again writing: Luke 2:1-4 **“In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because Joseph was descended from the house and family of David.”** Quirinius was fearful, hateful, and greedy. The purpose of the decree and registration was to collect a biased, oppressive, crippling tax. This tax triggered the revolt of the Zealots.

The good news of Christmas is no matter how horrible the atrocities of the world God’s love will transform everyone and everything making all glorious. No one is excluded, scripture declares Christmas is good news of great joy for all people.

God is pure joy. Heaven is pure joy. Jesus came to bring all of us joy. Jesus will in the future make each person’s joy complete. How this will happen is a mystery, so we use metaphors and parables. God’s steadfast love and promises are ever sure. Joy is coming and joy will be magnificent far beyond our grandest dreams. The prophet Isaiah, Matthew, John, and the Apostle Paul all tried to give us a glimpse of coming joy by writing: Isaiah 9:2, Matthew 4:16, Acts 26:18, John 1 and 8:12 **“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, and the shadow of death, on them light will shine.”** In a few minutes we will sing: *Silent night! Holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face. With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!*

“There is Room”

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

The world may feel like one long stretch of night, like an endless winter, or a hovering rain cloud.  
And life may feel like walking into the wind, an uphill climb in every direction, but we can still open the door.

We can’t calm every storm, but we can turn on the porch lights.

We can add chairs to the table.

We can keep clean sheets on the guest bed, just in case.

We can hold the elevator, and learn pronouns.

We can tell stories of belonging, and take turns listening.

We can learn each other’s names, and plant trees for our children.

We can study privilege and advocate for mental health.

We can insist, every single day, in a million different ways:

there is room,

there is room,

there is room for you here.

We can’t calm every storm, but we can turn on the porch lights.

Brene Brown notes that joy is the most vulnerable human emotion. A way to joy is to be vulnerable by acknowledging the myriad of ways you are weary. Brene’s research reveals that comparisons, judgment, blame, guilt, shame, apathy, fear, and hate come from a perspective that “I am never enough”. Jesus brings the antidote to all of this by demonstrating that you are enough. You are enough, because God created you good and in the image of God. You are enough because God took on flesh to be with you, to experience all you experience, so God can heal comfort and glorify you. You are enough, because Jesus provides grace to fill in every gap, bridge every divide, and make perfect your imperfections. You are enough because you belong to God’s family, God makes room for you. You are enough,

because Jesus has a space in heaven for you where all your uniqueness will shine to bring joy to others and where you will enjoy all your delights for eternity.

Every Sunday we proclaim this mysterious good news of great joy for all people through confession and forgiveness. We become vulnerable, let go, let come grace and make room for joy. Please rise in body or in spirit.

Against all odds, beyond all expectations, God's redeeming grace is transforming us, transforming everyone, transforming the cosmos so all will experience joy. Christmas is God making room for great joy to break beyond every boundary, for awe to push past the limits of our imaginations, for welcome to be extended to shepherds, strangers and all. Christmas tells how God views each of us as enough, worthy to belong to God's family forever. Christmas is an invitation for you to partner with God in proclaiming the good news for all people. An invitation for you to let the ever-flowing river of God's grace carry you to joy. An invitation for you to be gracious to everyone, welcome everyone and make room for everyone. Christmas is an invitation to trust your belovedness.

**"The Bravest Thing We Can Do"**

*a poem by Sarah Speed*

Trust your belovedness.

Let it be a protest, an act of resistance, a song of celebration.

Trust your belovedness in a world that is rarely satisfied.

Wear it like a badge of honor.

Speak it as confidently as your last name.

Tattoo it to your heart.

When outside forces chip away at your sense of self, when life asks you to hand over the keys, remember the water of baptism and the living water of Jesus.

Remember Jesus, the bread of life.

Remember creation.

Remember how it was good, so very good.

Let that truth hum through your veins.

Sing it so loud that it drowns out the weariness of the world, for the bravest thing we can ever do is trust that we belong here.

We have acknowledged that the world is a mess. We have acknowledged our weariness. We have been vulnerable through confession. We have let Jesus, the dawn of redeeming grace, illumine us. Let us expand hope with singing and allow ourselves to be amazed, so we too radiate the good news of great joy for all people.

The cosmos is on its tiptoes to see the wonderful sight of Jesus' coming reign to be fully manifest. The wounded world aches with longing for the healing Jesus brings. Jesus comes revealing God's salvation plan for us and the cosmos. Faith moves us to look beyond our current world for the fulfillment of our deepest desires and hopes. Christmas is a fest of the senses as we glimpse the glory of God.

We are celebrating that Jesus become flesh and moved into our neighborhood. God threw love-light into a fallen, broken world to save and fix all. God has a passionate desire to kindle each person's love-light into a blaze. Jesus came for you. God came to throw love-light into your messy, sometimes scary, world so you can perceive God's loving, illuminating presence. Jesus came to restore you to your true self, glorious inside and out. Jesus is the dawn of redeeming grace. Amen