

## Rejoice in the Lord

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主を喜ぼう

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Luke

2:8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, watching their flock during the night.

2:9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

2:10 Then the angel told them, "Stop being afraid! Listen! I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.

2:11 Today your Savior, the Lord Messiah, was born in the city of David.

2:12 And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a feeding trough."

2:13 Suddenly, a multitude of the Heavenly Army appeared with the angel, praising God by saying,

2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to people who enjoy his favor!"

2:15 When the angels had left them and gone back to heaven, the shepherds told one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what has taken place that the Lord has told us about."

2:16 So they went quickly and found Mary and Joseph with the baby, who was lying in the feeding trough.

2:17 When they saw this, they repeated what they had been told about this child.

2:18 All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

2:19 However, Mary continued to treasure all these things in her heart and to ponder them.

2:20 Then the shepherds returned to their flock, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

[International Standard Version]

Matthew

1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he is the one who will save his people from their sins."

1:22 Now all this happened to fulfill what was declared by the Lord through the prophet when he said,

1:23 "See, a virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel," which means, "God with us."

Every time, Brother Shigeta comes here, I always ask him the same question: how his wife, Toyoko, is doing. His answer is usually that, "Her mind is in good shape." I feel blessed when I hear that.

(Note: Mr Shigeta in the front seat stands up and corrects the word of Mr. Beck.)

Excuse me, what? "Her *spirit* is in good shape." Well, our flesh is not so important. If our spirit is doing well, it is just fine. But, not all spirits are actually doing well. When people are sick in bed for a long period of time, most of them become devastated. Some mindless people call it a divine punishment. It is not true. There is no God who punishes humans, which is a great blessing. Because Jesus has sacrificed himself, now we have nothing to worry about.

Therefore, when we are faced with illness or disaster in our lives, no matter how serious those problems are, we should take it as clear proof of our being loved by the Lord and be thankful, although we may not understand how these things happen. In the verses we just read, it is written, "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." And, it may sound nice to replace the plural words in this quote with the singular form.

"I am bringing good news of great joy just for you." After all, the Lord wants to bring joy to we miserable humans. Jesus once said:

John

15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"So that my joy may be yours." It is beyond our imagination. However, John the Baptist, who first introduced Jesus to the world, seemed to have experienced this joy.

John

3:27 John replied, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to them from heaven.

3:28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.'

3:29 It is the bridegroom who gets the bride, yet the bridegroom's friend, who merely stands by and listens for him, is overjoyed to hear the bridegroom's voice. That's why this joy of mine is now complete.

3:30 He must become more important, but I must become less important."

In order to obtain this joy, we need to have an attitude like John the Baptist. "I must put Jesus first, and I do not care about myself at all." It is more important than anything for us to have an attitude like this.

Christmas is a celebration known to people all over the world. For many years, shops all across the world have held Christmas sales, and their goal is just to make a lot of money. They play Christmas music and put up big decorated trees.

However, while I guess quite a few know the true meaning of Christmas, they still focus on whatever makes money for them. For many, this has become the feeling behind celebrating the Christmas. But, it is only those who know Jesus from personal experience that celebrate Christmas in true sense. When people understand Jesus, they have true peace and liberation as a result- the greatest joy man can receive.

By knowing Jesus and having a vibrant fellowship with him, all kinds of human thoughts: a sense of isolation, arrogance, self-centeredness and selfishness, meaningless self-pity, desperation and all other distresses will dissolve away.

On the other hand, we will gain true joy, peace and satisfaction. Jesus was born into this world in order to grant all mankind the salvation and the forgiveness of their sins. This is the miracle which is far beyond our comprehension and understanding.

However, only if we know Jesus will we receive this blessing, and we do not have to worry about anything anymore. It will lead us to having eternal life, and it is in a vibrant fellowship with Jesus that we find the source of true and everlasting joy.

The Lord Jesus is himself the life, the joy and the fountain of peace. By Jesus, all sorrows are turned into joy. With Jesus, the burdens of our life turn into joy. By Jesus, all meaningless efforts and the frustrations of being human are turned into perfect peace and consolation.

The fountain of true joy is, as I just mentioned, Jesus himself. What can we say when we think of Jesus? It leaves us speechless and embarrassed about ourselves. But, at the same time, we are filled with gratitude, aren't we?

**Luke**

2:10 Then the angel told them, "Stop being afraid! Listen! I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.

2:11 Today your Savior, the Lord Messiah, was born

in the city of David.

After all, he himself is the promised savior. "I am bringing you great joy." This is the message delivered to us on the Christmas day. A life without joy is totally gloomy and filled with boredom. The great joy provided for us through the Bible is not merely a personal pleasure or delight. It is something far more meaningful.

After all, it is the joy of Jesus, and the great joy that is provided through the Bible that makes you feel the everlasting blessing within your heart. It also helps to dissolve your worries and anxieties. And it leads you to a perfect peace while giving you a conviction that you are protected completely in the hands of the Lord God.

To give us this wonderful joy, Jesus, who is the eternal Lord God, took a human form and was born into this world. An angel of the Lord explained to Mary that her son was the savior who was promised thousands of years ago, saying:

**Matthew**

1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he is the one who will save his people from their sins.

1:22 Now all this happened to fulfill what was declared by the Lord through the prophet when he said,

1:23 "See, a virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel," which means, "God with us."

This is the liberation from all kinds of solitude. This promised savior is named "Jesus." And, he is the one who will save us from our sins. What is it that all humans absolutely need? It is the forgiveness of their sins. It is because it is not until all our sins are forgiven that we are allowed to enter a fellowship with the Lord God.

And it is through nothing but a fellowship with the Lord God that humans are satisfied and fulfilled. Sin is a wall that separates humans from the true God. However, by the sacrifice of Jesus, and through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus, this wall that used to separate humans and God was taken away.

It is more important than anything for us to have a conviction that, because of the blood Jesus has shed, all our sins are forgiven. What was Jesus born for? It was to die. It was impossible for him to die as long as he was the Creator, the true God.

However, it was indeed made possible for him to die when he took a human form. Jesus was born into this

world so that he could die. We cannot comprehend the greatness of Jesus no matter how hard we try. He is the eternal one. He is life itself.

As long as he was life itself, he could not let himself die. It was absolutely impossible. However, when the eternal God came down to this world in human flesh, he could die in a physical sense. And this was the sole reason that Jesus had to come down into this world. It was an unimaginable sacrifice.

Why did Jesus come here? Unless there was someone to sacrifice himself, and until the sinless died on behalf of the sinful, there would have been no way of salvation for us. The Bible clearly states that there could have been no other way for our sins to be forgiven. Jesus not only came down to this world, but he also sacrificed himself and died on our behalf.

When Jesus died on the cross, the Lord sacrificed himself for us. Jesus chose to die in order to forgive our sins. It was predicted in the Bible:

#### Isaiah

53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that made us whole was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed.

53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, each of us, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Whoever believes in what the Lord God has said and accepts Jesus is, of course, already saved.

That is to say, their sins are forgiven and they have peace with the Lord God as well as eternal life. David experienced this personally 3000 years ago.

#### Psalms

32:1 How blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Sin, indeed, is a horrible reality in our lives.

There is only one way to resolve our sins: it can only be resolved by the shed blood of the sacrifice. The Bible repeatedly says that our sins are forgiven when we are redeemed by blood. To resolve the problem of our sins, Jesus canceled our debt and paid a precious price to forgive our sins; this fact fills us with heartfelt joy.

Blessed are those who can confess this way with great joy: "the blood he shed brought us complete forgiveness." There could never have been a forgiveness of sins without blood being shed. But, the

blood was shed, which brought complete forgiveness of all humanity's sins.

David was filled with joy when he sang,

#### Psalms

103:12 As distant as the east is from the west, that is how far he has removed our sins from us.

A prophet called Micah proclaimed that the Lord has hurled all our sins into the depth of the sea.

Isaiah, too, testified that the Lord has blown away our transgressions like a cloud and evaporated away our sins like mist. Clouds are blown aside by the Sun and mists are totally evaporated. Likewise, the Lord God completely forgave all our sins by the sacrifice of Jesus.

All our sins vanished away and they cannot be seen by anyone. "I will never pay attention to your sins anymore. I'll remember your sins no more." Jesus is the one who can sanctify us all as if we have never committed any sin in our lives. In Jesus, to forgive our sins and not to remember our sins is the same thing.

This is the gospel exactly, and we are supposed to proclaim it to other people. That is to say, your sins have been already forgiven by the blood of Jesus. And, because the debt has been paid already, all you need to do is to accept this great gift from Jesus with gratitude, as he has forgiven your sins.

We need to make the sacrifice of Jesus, in which he gave his own blood and life, our personal experience. Jesus is the only one who can tell us that our sins are forgiven, and this is the most precious gift we can think of. It is the forgiveness of our sins. This is the gift nobody else could give.

What a wonderful liberation it is! It is a liberation from our remorse of conscience, a liberation from a fear of the wrath of God, and of course, a liberation from the fears of man. Paul expressed his gratitude as:

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift." Paul accepted this incredible gift, which was the forgiveness of his sins. Are we all prepared to accept the same gift? Forgiveness of sins is an unimaginably wonderful gift. To accept the forgiveness of sins is, of course, to accept Jesus.

Those who have accepted Jesus have no reason to fear anymore. Now, they have an eternal life. They can receive true peace and consolation. This is because the greatest problem of humans, as I just mentioned, arises from their sins.

The name given to the promised Savior is Jesus. He is the one who forgives all sins. He came here to solve the problem of our sins. The forgiveness of our sins is the greatest gift, consolation, and hope. We know that Jesus has taken our arrogance and sins away and that Jesus has solved the problem of our sins.

Jesus has opened the eyes of my heart. Jesus has shown me the source of all my sorrows, which was my sins. Sins separate humans from the Lord God. Separation from the Lord God brings us solitude, life with no joy, and no peace.

However, we know one thing very well. Jesus has promised us that he will forgive and forget all our sins once they are confessed. And Jesus is the one who never lies. He will never fail to keep the promise he made.

Those sins that are confessed to Jesus are all forgiven and forgotten. We all know that Jesus has forgiven all our sins, that the Lord has accepted us and that he gave us eternal lives, which is a truly incredible blessing. Our desperate desire should be to understand Jesus better and to serve Jesus as his vessels. The world we are living in cannot provide us with true spiritual support.

That is to say, it cannot give us true satisfaction. We all know that we have been redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus and that we no longer belong to ourselves, but are the temples of the Holy Spirit. From now on, the purpose of our life should be to please Jesus and, as vessels of Jesus, to proclaim his graceful gospel to as many people as possible.

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