

Joy To the World!
Luke 2:1-14
Christmas Eve
Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you siblings in faith,

Across time, there are different responses to the news of Jesus birth. Joy to the World didn't always carry an immediate joy-filled response. Every heart didn't prepare him room. Joy to the World, the beloved Christmas carol we know, was actually written for Easter.

But how did that news of Joy enter our world?

First... there's Mary. She has an angel tell her. That's... unique. **She has questions.** The angel has answers. **She accepts her role.** It isn't until months later that her relative, Elizabeth, helps her discern the joy of this news.

Joseph is ready to divorce Mary... when he has a dream. **An angel shows up and tells him what's what.** Joseph wakes up from the dream. **He is obedient.** He isn't necessarily joy-filled, he's dutiful.

Shepherds... they're just working when boom, **an angel** shows up. They're terrified. No kidding. But, they're told where to go see Jesus. The angel leaves... **they decide to go see Jesus.** Thank God they did.

Fast forward to modern times.

The story still grips us. It's powerful and timely. It's why we return, year after year, to hear it at Christmas with large gatherings.

It's funny how different people today interpret this story.

When the **Old Guys** heard it at Bible Study, they recalled having to memorize the story. They noted that this "new" translation—the New Revised Standard Version of 1989—isn't the same that they grew up with. Emperor Augustus was Caesar. The engaged Mary was espoused to Joseph.

It was a story so familiar—they knew it so well.

In fact, during **Women of Wisdom**, they appreciated that we were trying to look deeper in the details of the story—like, did you know the donkey isn't explicitly NAMED, we just assume Mary rode a donkey. One of the women bluntly said, "It doesn't matter. The story doesn't change for me whether the donkey is there or not—it's an amazing story."

Then, **there's my 7 year old (Sully as a sheep).**

Last weekend, we celebrated Christmas with my parents. Upon their arrival, they put all the presents under the tree.

Every few minutes, Sullivan would say that it was time to open them. It wasn't.

First, Grandma had crafts for them to make.

Then, the girls had to go to dance.

Then, we had to eat lunch.

Finally, it was time to open the presents.

AFTER... we heard the Christmas story. **The Spark Bible** (picture of Bible) is what Evie read that day. Sully was not thrilled by this.

Evie read about Mary and Joseph and the birth. Then, she turned the page.

“Wait, there's more!?” Sully was NOT too pleased to hear about the shepherds.

Graciously, I made her stop before Epiphany and the arrival of the wise magi.

When she finished, Sully asked, “why do we have to read the story?”

The answer is simple. Without the story of Jesus being born, there is no Santa Claus or presents, there isn't Christmas without the birth of Jesus.

We don't have to overanalyze it—we get it. It's not hard to see.

The story is meaningful (manger).

Conflict is already present—a young couple is already experiencing an enormous threat to the legitimacy of their marriage.

They are given a message from God through unique means.

Then, a journey to an overcrowded Bethlehem for a census, imposed by a ruler looking to tax his people—it's this act that creates the “no room”. It's not for a lack of hospitality, it's a resource shortage.

Everyone in Joseph's line is there. They take refuge wherever they can.

And they find joy in a birth that happens in a place with little peace. In a barn with a manger. For unto us a child is born... and it isn't what we expect as a dwelling for a king.

But that's where our king is born. Joy to the World, the Lord is Come—Jesus is born. Let heaven and nature—earth—sing. This child is sent from heaven and dwells among us.

In this place tonight, we gather to hear THAT story. Some of us have heard it for over 80 years. Some are just hearing it and processing it for the first time.

We might feel like Christmas has become too commercialized. Too much about the presents. Not enough Jesus.

The answer is simple. It's right in front of us.

We repeat the sounding joy.

We tell the story. Why is Jesus here in the first place?

To teach us about loving God and loving our neighbor. To provide us a dwelling here on earth and in heaven above.

We tell the story as our faithful mission statement for the world: It inspires our ministry, whether it's providing food to kids in school, blankets, coats, or even homes to our unsheltered neighbors, or encouraging our faith and trust in God from young to old.

It's the reason why we are filled with joy, even in a world filled with pain and sadness.

Because we are filled with Jesus, we are the hope that someone in our world needs. We are the wonders of his love. The wonders of his love. The wonders, wonders, of his love.

The joy of Christmas doesn't stop tomorrow afternoon. Be the wonder of God's love when you go back to work. When you return to school. When you encounter a stranger.

Before you open presents, read the story again. If you don't have a Bible handy, re-tell it. It doesn't matter if you get all the details perfect—make the story your own. God's truth and grace is the greatest gift you can give this Christmas. Joy to the World, indeed. Amen.