

The Gospel of Christmas / Good News of Great Joy

Genesis 3, Luke 1, Rev 22

1. Hope your thanksgiving was good!
 - a. Mine was great! Went to KC – overflowing sweet tea, gravy, and leftover turkey sandwiches loaded with mayo mustard and lettuce – on soft potato bread --- at LEAST as good as the main Thxgiving meal!
 - i. And rich time of conversations that lingered with family. Even better than we expected!
 - b. But as good as Thxgiving is, it usually is the kickoff to a season of stress and busyness.
 - c. Presents and materialism
 - d. Time with family and friends, mixed with disappointments
2. My longing for Simple Xmas
 - a. Struggle to engage, hustle and bustle
 - i. Comes and goes. But not necessarily RICH
 - b. I long for the Holiday to work as intended – a time for me to pause, remember, and truly celebrate the Good News of Jesus' birth!
 - i. The ESSENCE.... The simple Xmas
 - ii. To really lean in to the scriptures.....the narrative of JC's birth
 - iii. but also into the message: The Good News
 1. Great Joy!
 2. More than Santa, more than presents and food and family,
 3. Something rich and real.
 4. The Great Joy that God has come near, and that MY LIFE IS DIFFERENT
 - iv. Real Joy!
3. So these next few weeks, we're going to lean into THAT together during our CG times together in this Christmas Advent series: Good News of Great Joy
 - a. To remember. To read and remember GOD'S WORD.
 - b. To consider and celebrate JC's Birth ... that signaled Good News of Great Joy
 - c. Because at core, Xmas is about GOOD NEWS... that brings great joy
4. So we Must know the news and why it brings GREAT JOY as we pause and remember
 - a. IN ORDER to celebrate well
 - b. In ORDER to feel the Gratitude and the Joy
 - c. Good news must stand against bad news if it's to bring joy
 - i. Good News of Great Joy must stand in front of Bad News of Great Sorrow.
 - ii. So that's where we're going to start this evening.
 1. Perhaps a different way to launch into Xmas!
 2. But I trust if we take this journey together, it'll lead us to a deeper and richer appreciation for the Good News of Great Joy!
5. The background/context – Xmas goes all the way back to the beginning of human history!
 - a. Genesis – the first man and woman, in the Garden of Eden, perfect, glorious, joyous, walking w/ God
 - b. Genesis 3 – man and woman, didn't listen to God, didn't trust him
 - i. Serpent: Did God actually say (that if you eat this fruit of the knowledge of Good and Evil you'll die)?
 1. 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,[b] she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.
 2. 8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
 - ii. Bad News of Great Sorrow!
 1. Sin and death

- 2. Struggle and toil and pain
 - 3. You and me
- iii. Kicked out of Eden
 - 1. No more walking in the afternoon with God
 - 2. No more life of ease and delight
 - 3. Now we live by the stress and toil and struggle of our brow
 - 4. Until we all die, and return to the ground from which we came
- iv. BAD NEWS OF GREAT SORROW!!!!
- c. But even here, at the beginning, God gives a promise... a rescuer would come... GOOD NEWS!
 - i. 14 The Lord God said to the serpent,
 - ii. ...15 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
 - iii. and between your offspring [SEED] and her offspring [SEED];
 - iv. he shall bruise your head,
 - v. and you shall bruise his heel."
 - vi. A seed of woman – will stamp on the head of the serpent
 - vii. The GOOD NEWS
 - 1. The GOSPEL!!!
 - a. Often called the proto-gospel
 - 2. The first hint that God would provide us hope – salvation
 - 3. Not only would HE triumph over the evil one (the Bible later clearly identifies this serpent as Satan)
 - 4. But that he would do it THROUGH US – THROUGH Humanity – THE SEED OF THE WOMAN
 - 5. One Day.....
- d. But in the meantime, not only are we distant from God, living in struggle and futility, we die, each and every one
 - i. Genesis 5 is a list of the generations of Adam....
 - ii. ⁵ Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.
 - iii. ⁸ Thus all the days of Seth were 912 years, and he died.
 - iv. ⁹ When Enosh had lived ... 905 years, and he died.
 - v. ¹² When Kenan had lived ... 910 years, and he died.
 - vi. ¹⁵ When Mahalalel had lived ... 895 years, and he died.
 - vii. ¹⁸ When Jared had lived ... 962 years, and he died.
 - viii. ...²⁵ When Methuselah had lived ... 969 years, and he died.
 - ix. ²⁸ When Lamech had lived ... 777 years, and he died.
 - x. Each entry ends with AND HE DIED
 - 1. You think these men lived a long time? That what you're seeing?
 - 2. NO, you're suppose to see that even so, NONE OF THEM ESCAPED DEATH
 - 3. All of them died... no matter what
 - xi. And he Died... no matter how long he lived, what he did, what children he had...
 - 1. And He Died.
 - 2. Rom 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so also death was passed on to all men, because all sinned.
 - 3. Death reigned from the time of Adam.... (Rom 5:14)
 - xii. And God's children, human beings meant to live forever in God's presence.... Died.
 - 1. What was the most unnatural thing for a human became the very essence of nature.... Death.
 - 2. God keeps his promises.... If you eat that fruit, you will die.
- e. But the Good news is not forgotten. The Good news is that God keeps ALL his promises.
 - i. He was busy at work, behind the scenes, bringing forward his great rescue plan...
 - ii. He made and kept his promise... Specifically, to women through barrenness, despair, and pain
 - 1. Those who were utterly unable to have children.... Infertility... Or Too old
 - 2. Utterly unable to accomplish on their own
 - iii. God seems to have a special heart for women who are unable to have children

1. Or who are unloved, mistreated
 - iv. Like
 1. Abraham's wife Sarah (GEN 17)
 - a. God's promise that they would have a child... and that the seed of promise would come THROUGH THEM was given not only to Abraham, but to Sarah
 - b. Barren all her life... and now FAR TOO OLD to have children.
 - i. Menopause decades in the rearview mirror
 - c. Yet God was faithful to her, and kept his promise that even her, in her old age, and the barrenness of her womb, a miracle could happen
 - i. With man it is impossible but with GOD all things are possible!
 - d. Only God could have done this, her friends and neighbors whispered
 2. Rebekah, barren (Gen 25:21)
 3. Rachel – barren (Gen 29)
 4. Leah – unwanted (Gen 29)
 5. Tamar – widowed and rejected (Gen 38)
 6. Rahab – foreigner AND prostitute (Joshua 2,6)
 7. Ruth – foreigner, widowed, childless (ruth 1)
 8. Bathsheba – wife to murdered husband, mother of a dead child (2 Sam 11)
 - a. All these women who struggled with barrenness and brokenness and rejection
 - b. And that's just in the line of Christ – the Seed Himself!
 - c. From the Line of David, through Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham
 9. Many others:
 - a. Samson's mother – barren (Judges 13)
 - b. Hannah – Samuels mother – barren (1 Samuel 1)
 10. ISRAEL, God's people themselves, beaten and broken, carried off into captivity for their refusal to trust God
 - a. God characterizes His people as --- a barren woman (Isaiah 54)
 - v. A barren nation tracing back their lineage through barren women, all the way back to the mother of life herself –
 1. Eve, who became the mother of death for us all....
 2. But to whom was given the great promise → a rescuer would come from you
 3. Longing Longing For the child of promise
 - vi. It's been SO LONG
 1. God seems so far away
 2. Hope so small... a faint memory of hope
 3. Perhaps you feel like that tonight?
6. It's into THAT backdrop, that waiting, that despair and longing that we arrive at the timeframe of the Christmas story...
 - a. 2000 years ago in the Middle East
 - b. Gods not forgotten his promise... And hes doing something brand new... something he'd been waiting for, working toward, with all his might, through all those winters... all those generations.... God's been working... Through all of our tears and sorrows and death..... and now, it's finally time:
 - i. in Luke 1, we meet another old couple: Zechariah and Elizabeth
 1. Elizabeth barren all her life
 2. But God shows up, and now she who was barren is now pregnant
 - a. As in Isaiah 54:1
 - b. With John the Baptist, filled with God's spirit from birth, he long prophesied to prepare the way for The Messiah – the Seed of Promise
 - c. The rescuer, long awaited
 3. She who was barren, she who was desolate and too old to hope,
 - a. is singing for joy.... This has happened before...
 4. And it will happen again!

c. Lets' look first into a young woman's home, in a small town in the hillcountry of Judah

i. Luke 1

1. 26 In the sixth month [of Elizabeth's pregnancy] the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary [which providentially means both beloved and bitterness]. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus [which means THE RESCUER!]. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."
 - a. THIS IS THE ONE!!!!!! The Seed of Promise. Long foretold.
 - b. The promised one...
 - c. Gen 3:15 → seed – singular!
2. 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"
 - a. ANOTHER WOMAN with an impossible pregnancy!
3. 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

ii. How can this be since I'm a virgin?

1. Mary knew where babies came from.
 - a. Simple but powerful reminder that they weren't gullible pre-scientific people prone to believe any supernatural miracle
2. Instead, we readers can see and perhaps reply: "How could it be the Promised Child if you WEREN'T a virgin!!?"
 - a. Not the seed of a man... but the seed of a woman, almost counterintuitive
 - i. Even these ancient folks knew generally that the seed came from the man
 - ii. But God did something amazing
 - b. Isaiah 7:14, ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (God With Us)
 - i. So the Seed of promise could honestly be called a seed of WOMAN (not man) since the child's father would be God, not Joseph.
 - ii. See how incredible God is in fulfilling his promises, even to the detail none would have expected
 - iii. God keeps his promises
 - c. Gal 3:16 - ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.
3. Remember the line of childless women stretching back to Abraham?
4. Mary, don't you see, this is how God works!
 - a. He delights to carry forth the seed of promise through lines of messy, hopeless, broken, barren women....
 - b. LOVES to work through men and women who you'd least expect
 - i. The ones with problems
 - ii. The ones with pasts
 - iii. OR PRESENTS
 - iv. Those with obvious sin issues
 1. The prostitutes
 2. The adulterers

- 3. People with addictions
 - 4. People who burst out in anger
 - 5. People who'd blown it in a thousand different ways
 - v. People with hidden sin issues
 - 1. Men and Women who struggle with pornography
 - 2. With pride and selfishness
 - 3. With materialism and the love of money
 - vi. People with weaknesses
 - 1. and doubts
 - 2. Sorrows and fears
 - 3. wounded
 - 4. Sick and sore
 - vii. In other words, People like you
 - 1. And people like me
- c. Brothers and sisters I stand before you tonight as one I believed God could never use
 - i. I knew the depths of my sinfulness
 - 1. My hidden and longstanding Sexual struggles
 - ii. I know how weak and prone to worry I am
 - 1. At times crippled by anxiety and self-consciousness
 - 2. Shut down in doubts and emotional disconnection
 - 3. Another pastor's kid hypocrite
 - iii. But look what the Lord has done?
 - 1. God is using me
 - 2. And he's healing me, and growing me.
 - a. Slowly. Sometimes SO VERY SLOWLY
 - iv. Even when sometimes the setbacks seem more frequent than the victories
 - 1. Just this week, as I reapplied for my family's 2020 Obamacare plan, expecting nothing to change,
 - a. I was instead faced with a very substantial increase in our health insurance premiums.
 - b. Now, I've been experiencing significant progress and growth in my struggles with anxiety.
 - c. Some major milestones and stakes in the ground.
 - d. But this week, Monday, I was overcome by worry.
 - i. Gripped me like a junkyard dog
 - ii. And right after Ben's excellent teaching on NOT WORRYING!!!!
 - iii. And him using me as an example of now worrying about paying \$ to the govt!
 - e. I thought I'd gotten past this, grown
 - f. I felt like such a failure.
 - g. Thankfully the Lord has used this week as an opportunity to draw me into his kindness, and keep me moving forward
 - v. But the point of that story is, I'm among you as one who struggles
 - 1. Who takes what seems 3 steps forward, and then 3 steps back
 - 2. Perhaps you can relate
 - d. But God hasn't changed. And he still seems to delight to use folks who are messy, imperfect, desolate, and hopeless.
- e. GOD does his best work where hope is all but lost
 - i. It's his superpower!
 - ii. Making a way where there is no way

- iii. Bringing the dead things of the universe to life
- 5. In the great moment of the Incarnation – the hope of the human race since Adam and Eve --- God chooses someone young, female, poor, and utterly unimportant socially....
- 6. God kept his promise
- 7. All the way back to Eve
- 8. And now, a daughter of eve, when faced with the opportunity to trust God’s words, his plan for her life, she responds differently that her great great grandmother
 - a. **38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”**
 - b. And history turns
- 9. AHHHHHHHHH!!!!
 - a. Can you hear it??
 - b. The great crowd in heaven, a great multitude of angels and humans, on the edge of their seats
 - c. AND THE KICK’S GOOD!!!!!! → AHHHHHHHH
 - d. Hallelujah!!! Praise God.... It’s finally going to happen.
 - i. We’ve waited for this for SO LONG
- d. THAT’S The backstory to CHRISTMAS YALL
 - i. It’s all the way back to adam and eve, didn’t you know?
 - ii. A man and woman in radiance.... Perfect humanity. The king and queen of the world.....who would hear God’s voice and distrust him, choose their own way instead
 - iii. Standing now behind another man and woman....
 - 1. Poor, humble, farther removed from God’s walking presence
 - 2. But they heard God’s voice, and believed. Trusted
 - a. Let it be done unto me
 - iv. And history TURNS on a dime
 - 1. In an instant, the God who created the heavens and the earth, who breathed life into Adam, who fashioned the first woman from his side....
 - 2. He became small.... Smaller than anyone could have thought possible.
 - a. Smaller even than mary and joseph
 - 3. a cell → a seed
 - 4. Not of a man, but specifically of the woman! Just as God had promised.
 - 5. A seed that would grow, and die,
 - a. Bear the mortal blow from evil on the cross
 - b. And stamp on the head of Satan... and break sin and death forever
 - 6. Jesus Himself said:
 - a. John 12:24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. (NIV)
 - b. Romans 14:9 - For this reason Christ died and returned to life, so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.
 - 7. That we too, though our bodies die and are buried in the ground, like a seed we too may be raised to new and BETTER life!
 - a. The Good News of Great Joy this Christmas is nothing less than the great hope of your own physical resurrection from the dead!
 - v. Maybe you’re here this evening and you’ve never really believed in and accepted this for yourself
 - 1. You’ve heard about Jesus
 - 2. But never decided to go all in on it all
 - a. His Lordship over your life
 - b. His offer of forgiveness for your sins
 - c. And the great hope of eternal life with him that starts NOW
 - 3. If that’s you I invite you to Hear the Gospel of Christmas

- a. And to respond
 - b. Cry out to the one who has moved heaven and earth to bring you home
 - c. Hold you close
 - d. And bring you back to life
 - 4. In your heart, pray and tell him these things. That you believe he is who he said
 - a. That he died for you, and his forgiveness is your only hope
 - b. Tell him that you want HIM to be your rescuer
 - c. And you want to follow him with your whole life
 - 5. I invite you to do that now
 - a. And take the next step in your great journey to Great Joy this Christmas
- e. So, for all of usThis Christmas --
 - i. Hear the Gospel
 - 1. The GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY
 - 2. God has come... Immanuel, God WITH US
 - a. Again! Impossibly
 - b. It's been SO LONG since he'd walked with us in the Garden
 - c. But 20 centuries ago, The Word became flesh, and moved into the neighborhood.
 - 3. God with us
 - a. Come to rescue.... At all costs, those who live in the shadow of sin and death
 - b. Those who could never save themselves
 - c. Those who's broken God's commands and his heart.
 - d. Run far from him, and demanded to do life their own way, to be their OWN kings and queens
 - e. Hold up the world on their own shoulders
 - f. And so broken themselves in the process
 - 4. Jesus, the Seed of Promise has come
 - a. For you, and me
 - i. And he invites us to respond to HIM with trust (rather than rebellion)
 - ii. And he's coming again
 - 1. Even though it's seemed so long
 - 2. We've grown weary with this new waiting
 - 3. So easy to lose hope
 - 4. Yet hear his words in the final chapter of the Bible,
 - 5. In the Revelation of John, we see into Heaven,
 - iii. Rev 22 1Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God [...and the GREAT CITY of Heaven, and all God's People....and] the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.
 - 1. Humanity impossibly restored to their position of rulership over the new earth
 - a. Kings and Queens ruling with God in righteousness
 - iv. And we hear Jesus Himself saying:
 - 1. 7 "And behold, I am coming soon. → THE SECOND CHRISTMAS
 - 2. 12 "Behold, I am coming soon → GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY
 - 3. 16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."
 - v. 17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.
 - vi. 20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon."
- f. And we, together with John 20 centuries ago, join in the joy, and the longing at this Good News of Great Joy, which is already here, and yet still coming... joining with all the saints in anticipating the 2nd Christmas ... and say:
 - i. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

CHOPPING BLOCK

- g. Let's take a quick peak over at Joseph.... God's doing something there too!
 - i. Matthew 1
 - ii. ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ^[e] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed^[f] to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.
 - iii. Joseph gets a bad rap
 - 1. When he knew nothing of supernatural intervention, he already had decided to act with mercy and compassion – even though he'd been hurt and wronged!
 - 2. Joseph the Just
 - 3. He had the legal right to demand Mary be executed for this
 - 4. But instead resolved in his heart to act toward his wife with mercy and compassion
 - iv. Let's read more:
 - v. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet [Isaiah 7:14]: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).
 - vi. And then, when God speaks to HIM, becoming the 2nd human to know God's plan, when he considered the cost, his own status, pleasure, reputation,
 - 1. 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.
 - 2. HE trusted God!
 - 3. And acted on it, pushing back against the curse of his forefather Adam, and leaning into the hope of the Rescuer, long foretold.