Christmas Thoughts: Pastor‘s message

How I cherish the words from Luke 2, when the angel proclaims to the shepherds: ″Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”

These words make we want to respond with singing ‘Joy to the world’ but thankfully we have already sung that Christmas Carol.

Humanly speaking things weren't really that joyful on that first Christmas Eve. Nor were things going well leading up to that first Christmas. In fact, the entire Christmas story is one of human dilemma. We have a tendency to marvel at the Christmas story--but being in Joseph or Mary's shoes, I'm sure was anything but marvelous for the most part for them. In fact, the world was in pretty bad shape not just for Joseph and Mary, but in general.

Over 2000 years later, we are celebrating Christmas once again--God's display of grace and love, peace on earth and good-will to men and women, and yet there are so many things going on these days, that turbulent for many communities, countries and the world in general.

We find ourselves surrounded by war, shootings, violence, hate crimes, individuals suffering from emotional turmoil, all in a world that seems doomed to unrest. Yet, in the midst of all this uncertainty, we're supposed to celebrate Christmas and sing "Joy to the World" imagining that our world is at peace.

The circumstances couldn't have been much worse for Mary and Joseph during that time leading up to the birth of our Saviour. There was no medical care for the Mary or her baby. They could not even find a decent place to have the baby. Furthermore, there was a question surrounding the birth of her baby, being out of wedlock.

Humanly speaking, there was really nothing positive to be expected for Mary, Joseph, and the baby. And all of this was happening amidst a great political crisis in which an unwanted census was forced upon the already rebellious Jewish people by then super-power Rome.

And yet, somehow, in spite of all that was against them, Mary held fast to the promise given to her by the angel Gabriel. Somehow, she kept the faith,

pushed on, never giving up hope, determined to give birth to this holy child, no matter what.

And what would have happened to Mary had Joseph not had faith in the son of God? How would an unwed mother have fared in first-century Galilee? Would her parents have thrown her out? Could Mary and Jesus have wound up as a homeless family?

But, by the strength of God's grace, in the midst of that darkened stable, there was true joy. It seems that God's joy is not dependent on external things. God's joy is an inner state of happiness you can only get if you are at harmony with God. If we are at harmony with God, the world around us may be falling apart, but we can still experience peaceful joy in our hearts!

In this spirit, the apostle Paul writes to his flock in Philippi: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and, again, I say, rejoice!" And what makes this "command" to rejoice all the more remarkable is that he writes it to a persecuted congregation.

In other words he is encouraging the Philippians, and suggesting that in the midst of persecution: rejoice. When they throw you into prison for the sake of Jesus--rejoice. When they ridicule you and treat you with disrespect--rejoice!

Joy in the midst of suffering--that is God's kind of joy!

We need to be reminded of what is really important about Christmas, the basics, our salvation, and that God is always with us.

We come to this night knowing what has and has not happened in our lives and we want to be reminded that the Christmas story is still true and that the original blessing is still real for and present to us.

We come to reclaim and reconnect to our original blessing. We come to hear its heartbeat ringing in our ears like Christmas bells.

Maybe that's why so many show up this night even if they rarely or never go to church the rest of the year. And that is not a criticism or judgment of anyone. It is, rather, a recognition of the power this night has to call us back to ourselves and touch our deepest longings and desires to be

remembered, seen, recognized, valued, loved, and called beyond the circumstance of our lives.

All of that is held in the manger of Jesus. It's why the shepherds "went with haste" to "see this thing that has taken place." And it's why they "returned glorifying and praising God." What else can be more glorified than seeing the Christ child?

It doesn't matter who you are, why you are here, what you do or don't believe, what you've done and left undone, or what has and has not happened in your life, this manger we come together to worship this evening is for you and this is your child. "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

I hope and pray that we may go back to the basics on this Christmas Eve and rejoice in the gift that God has shared with us and the whole earth. Then, and only then, can we truly chime in with the angelic choirs of angels: "Joy to the World, the Lord is come!".

Peace, Hope, Love and Joy in the Christ child. Now and always. Merry Christmas to you all. Amen