

Surprised by JOY

Ուրախութեան Անակնկալը

Advent 3

Luke 1:26-56

-What are the 10 happiest countries in the world? (from least to best)

New Zealand, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Israel, Iceland, Denmark, and Finland.¹

-I don't know how they will rank those countries. I am sure they have certain parameters.

I am quite sure you can visit those places and experience the joy of those cities, people, food, art and so on.

-The issue is when you return, you are back to your daily life, and you will face the same issues that you had before. It is fun and joyful to visit those places. It has its joyful moments. I want to ask a deeper question. **What truly brings joy in life?**

We are in the Advent season: Coming, Arrival, գալուստ

Who is coming? Why is he coming?

I started this journey saying God will surprise us. After 400 years of silence, God surprised humanity with the pregnancy of Elizabeth. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth were astonished. God also surprised Mary, the mother of Jesus.

-When the angel gave Mary the news that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit, she was surprised and afraid. The angel's first words were:

"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28 ESV).

The word "greetings" in Greek is *Chairo*² which means **Rejoice, be glad.**

Of course, young Mary was **terrified and confused**. The angel comforted Mary **"Do not be afraid."**

God has His ways to surprise humanity.

-Mary visits Elizabeth. Both are pregnant in unusual circumstances.

"Mary's visit to Elizabeth is a wonderful human portrait of the older woman, pregnant at last after hope had gone, and the younger one, pregnant far sooner than she had expected."³

"And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit," (Luke 1:41 ESV)

-The remark about the Holy Spirit filling Elizabeth is crucial, for it indicates that **her remarks and emotions are directed by God.** This is not artificial joy.

Then Elizabeth said to Mary:

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” (Luke 1:42-44 ESV)

I love how the mother of John the Baptist calls Mary the mother of her LORD. How wonderful is when each person understands his or her place in God’s plan.

Then we read how Mary reflects on this joyful moment saying

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior (Luke 1:46,47 ESV)

Mary’s song of Praise (*The Magnificat* in Latin) is one of the most famous songs in Christianity. We Armenians have a great *sharagan Medzatsoustse* based on it. Many great musicians such as Bach have *Magnificat* masterpieces.

Mary’s spirit is rejoicing in God, Savior.

-How in the world are these women joyful?

-How can we find the same joy?

-Is joy a command? Is joy the result of something?

-Let us take the **Fruit of the Spirit**:

“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Gal 5:22 ESV)

What the apostle is saying here is **not** “be more loving, be more joyful, more peaceful.”

-Those virtues **are a product of the Holy Spirit**, the fruit of the Spirit. It is the work of God. You cannot get them by force; only God can pour them in us and that transform our lives. **It changes us.** (Like happened to Elizabeth and Mary)

So, joy (and love, and peace...) and a result of what God does in us.

- Yet, in the Bible, we also see a **command** to love and to rejoice.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:4 ESV)
Love one another as I loved you....

- Joy is the fruit of the Spirit. The Joy that Mary and Elizabeth experienced, was the work of the Spirit.

- Then what is the role of humanity in experiencing this joy?

Mary allowed God's Spirit to work in her. (We have a role to play as well.)

Mary was surprised, astonished, afraid:

-But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. (Luke 1:29 ESV)

-"How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34 ESV)

-God answered her:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, (Luke 1:35 ESV)

For nothing will be impossible with God. (Luke 1:37 ESV)

Mary's response:

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:37,38 ESV)

Please follow this dialogue! Do you see how God is doing His work? Mary, with all kinds of fears and uncertainties, obeying the command of God.

There is joy in this obedience.

- I can visit all those wonderful countries, the top 10 ones. I am not sure they will bring satisfaction and joy. They can bring some happiness and change of my mood. I'll come back to my life, and all my worries and my issues are facing me.

- You see the joy that I am speaking is what we read in Ephesians. God adopted us when we did not deserve it. God had mercy on us when we were alienated from him. **God did not give up from humanity:**

God knows me by name and calls me to be His child.

Therefore: **I can say, rejoice always, and again I say rejoice.**

It is not easy to rejoice always. The bar is set quite high.

The KEY:

I can do the command rejoice when I am IN THE LORD. **In, By, and With His Grace.**

John describes this:

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4,5 ESV)

We discussed those verses in the year 2022 when we studied the Gospel according to John. To remain in Jesus means to be connected. To be in touch with the God the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

If we read further, we will arrive to this verse:

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11 ESV)

So again, the key is to be connected with Jesus daily.

To end my sermon I like to share, Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!

² Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

³ Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!

⁵ For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

-First we see a command: **Make a joyful noise to the LORD.** It is collective worship.

It is us today what we are doing. We are together singing, praising, praying, listening, serving, loving, caring...We are IN HIS PRESENCE.

Gathering together is so essential in our life of worship. (sermon series about this 2022)

-So we are **joyful**, and also we are **glad and happy**. The scripture does not differentiate between them here.

-By the way, this does not mean we don't have days when we lament. There is time for everything. I was with a person who lost her father last month. She was in tears. Of course, to lose a dear father is not easy. Yet, in our sorrow we don't lose our hope and peace. God will give us His joy again in His Time.

The psalmist gives two ways how to be joyful in the LORD

1. Know God:

Know the Lord. Because of who God is; knowing who He is will help us know who we are.

If you know who God is, that means you know what HE did for you and for me, how he rescued us, how he redeemed us. We can have joy, we can rejoice in the LORD, always I say, rejoice.....

2. Give thanks, have a heart of gratitude:

To develop a heart of gratitude to the Lord is good medicine for our souls.

For example, please be attentive around you; please notice things, such as walk in the mountains, watch the sunset, go serve in a foodbank, just observe how many gifts God granted you. How blessed you are...

To finish my sermon, I find how Christ died for my eternal salvation and joy; I just humbly accept Him in my life:

looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:2 ESV)

- Is joy a command? Is joy the result of something?

Allow the Spirit of the Lord fill you with love, peace and joy... then you can rejoice in the Lord...always...

1. <https://www.cntraveller.com/gallery/the-happiest-countries-in-the-world>

2. *Chairo* is the same word used Matthew describing the wise men when they saw the star: When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy

3. N.T. Wright Luke for Everyone, P16

Some of the ideas I used from the sermon by Dan Westman, Sermon Joy, PBCC June 26,2022