



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent**

December 22, 2024

# Assurance of Joy

## Luke 1:39–56

<sup>39</sup> *In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, <sup>40</sup> and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”*

<sup>46</sup> *And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; <sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” <sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.*

John the Baptist leaped for joy in his mother’s womb. There he was, minding his own business in his mother’s womb, doing things that babies at that stage of pregnancy do – growing, learning, sleeping, dreaming, making faces, moving around – and suddenly, into the house walks the mother of Jesus, newly pregnant with the Son of God. And the forerunner of Christ has his first encounter with the Savior of all mankind. What alerted him to the Lord’s presence? Was it a flash of light? Some kind of resonance on a spiritual level? Did Jesus speak to him, as God spoke to His other prophets? We don’t know. What we do know is that the pre-born John was made aware of the presence of the pre-born Christ. And he leaped for joy in his mother’s womb! And the mission of Christ had begun.

Part of Jesus’ purpose in coming was to bring joy to His people on earth. The shepherds received the message of His birth with great joy (Luke 2:10). The wise men from the East saw the star that was to lead them to Him, and they rejoiced with exceeding joy (Matt. 2:10). Everywhere He went, He brought joy. With every healing, every kindness,



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every expression of divine love, He was bringing joy into the world.

He often spoke of His own joy. In the parable of the lost sheep, when the shepherd finds it, what does he do? “He lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you,” says Jesus, “there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:5b–7a). Whose joy? His joy! He rejoices to find the lost. Indeed, “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Likewise, in the parables of the lost coin and the lost son, we see the joy of God over the repentance of sinners.

Sometimes His joy is seen in unexpected places. He teaches His followers that they are to have joy in the midst of persecution. “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day,” He says, “and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:22–23).

Of course, our joy will not be perfect in this life. The oppression of the world against Christians brings great sorrow. Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament [when I am gone], but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy . . . you have sorrow now, [knowing that I am leaving], but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:20, 22).

Sometimes our sorrow is our own fault, on account of our sins, for we know that our sins anger our Father in heaven. In David’s penitential psalms, he acknowledges God’s displeasure over his sins, but he also recognizes that it is God’s nature to forgive. In Psalm 30, he writes of how His forgiveness brings joy, saying, “His anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning (Psalm 30:5). Like David, we weep for a time on account of our sins, but God restores us, giving us joy.

If you’ve ever had the experience of Peter, you know what this is like. Not only did Peter deny His Friend and Savior, His Lord, His Master, but Jesus saw him do it. The most significant, most precious relationship he would ever have was severed, and he went out and wept bitter tears. You needn’t wonder if your Savior has ever seen you deny Him by your sinful behavior; He has. Oh, we have every reason to weep like Peter, but never forget: in the wake of his sin, Peter discovered the forgiving nature of God, for the breach he created was repaired by the love of God, and the joy he experienced was beyond words.

Jesus gave joy to His disciples, by sending them in His name to preach the gospel, to cast out demons, and to heal. When they returned, they were ecstatic. Luke tells us, “The



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seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven’” (Luke 10:17–20).

Beloved, is your name written in heaven? Let me ask it this way: Are you baptized? Do you have faith in Jesus as your Savior from sin, death, and the devil? Then rejoice! Your name is on record in heaven as a follower of Christ and a child of the King!

It was not Christ’s goal, by the way, that you should have a little bit of His joy, a mere sampling of it; rather, He said, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). Is your joy full? I don’t mean to suggest that you should have no sorrow – Jesus said you would, as we’ve already heard. Nor am I saying that you will have no opposition in the world – according to Jesus, you certainly will: “A servant is not greater than his master,” He told His disciples. “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). You certainly won’t be free of problems. Scripture says, “Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). And you will continue to be plagued by temptation and sin. As long as you reside in this world and in this body of sin and death, you will struggle to live in a way that pleases God.



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But joy goes beyond all this. Joy comes with the assurance that you belong to Christ, your sins are forgiven, heaven is your home, resurrection is your future, and that, regardless of what happens in this life, God will cause it all to come together for your ultimate good, which is to be with Him for days without end.

May He fill you, my dear brothers and sisters, with His indefatigable joy, for now and for always. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen