

First Baptist Church Smiths Falls

December 24, 2017 - Advent 4

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-11

1 ¶ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 8 ¶ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see -- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Prayer of Illumination:

Message: "Rejoice in the Lord Always - Again I say Rejoice"

Introduction:

- Let me ask you three Christmas questions: 1. What nationality is Santa Claus? North Polish!!! 2. If an athlete can get Athletes foot, what can an astronaut get? A bad case of Mistle-toe!!! 3. What is the scientific name for a fear of Santa Claus? Claustrophobia!!!
- I love the joy of the Christmas Season - although we fear losing the

Christ Child in hustle and bustle of the business of the celebration of Christmas, and with the evil of this world growing day by day, and with the many significant conflicts of this world, there is still no need for long-faced Christians. As the Angels proclaimed: "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy!*"

- This is the Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Hope in the joy of the Christ-Child, and I believe that there is reason to rejoice in the Hope we have in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Part 1: Hope and Joy

- There is the story of the father who wanted to get his children really excited about Christmas - every year, he would pretend to be the real Santa Claus - and he pulled no stops. He would get the ladders up to the roof, and there he had Christmas bells, he had the boots, and he even had a large crate which would make a sufficiently loud "THUMP" on the roof. He would herd the children into bed early on Christmas Eve, and warn them that they had to go to sleep, that Santa was coming, and they must stay in their beds - anyone caught by Santa out of bed wouldn't get presents. And the father was good at

pretending to be the real Santa - as soon as the children were in bed, and quieted down, the father would climb on the roof, then start very quietly jingling the string of bells. Gradually, the bells would get louder - then the father would drop the crate on the roof to produce the "THUMP" as if the jolly man's sleigh had landed. The father would then stomp across the roof to the chimney. After a few minutes, the boots were used again, and the bells signalled the end of the visit. The father was good at delighting the children by pretending to be the Real Santa - he thrilled them every year, and every year they would curl in their beds, listening intently. Until one year, even though it all started fine with the bells gradually grew louder, the children nestled under their covers, the thump heralded the Red-suited man's arrival, the boots started their heavy walking across the roof, and just as the children were filled with the glee of expectation, the walking abruptly ended. This was followed by an unusual thump, then the sound of a body sliding across the roof, and the worst yell the children had ever heard. And then a horrific yell, the language and tone told the children one thing - it was their own

daddy who was now falling off the roof into the garden below.. Now, Dad was fine, and yet another joyful story is added to this season.

- The Advent and Christmas Seasons are supposed to be a time of joy - A time of collecting wonderful stories of hope and peace and great delight. Most importantly, Christmas time is when we are to feel the hope of the Christ-child come into our hearts, and rejoice as we celebrate with family and food and fun.
- And yet we can struggle at this time of the year. We miss loved ones who have died since our last Christmas. We have friends or family that drive us crazy, and make our get togethers become tense. We live in a society which will not allow us to have an office "Christmas" party as saying the word "Christmas" might be deemed to be offensive to someone (someone that few of us have actually met, or so it seems). We struggle with a government which is so scared of being politically-correct that any picture of a religious nature is no longer allowed at Christmas time in Government offices. We live in a society in which it is fine to cuss and violate the name of Jesus Christ in public and in movies, but you had better not preach

about Him unless you are ready to fear for your very life, as recent Christian persecution proves.

- Sometimes it seems that this season of Hope and Joy, Advent, will never get off the ground and open our souls for the wonder of Christmas. Sometimes it seems that we cannot find reasons in this world for the joy and the Hope that this season is to bring.
- And then again, sometimes it seems that the joy and hope of the Christmas season is for all the wrong reasons - for Santas, frostys, presents, trees and glitter. Sometimes the joy seems squashed by so many voices of negativity that rejoicing seems impossible to be heard. I saw a movie where a woman was wearing the inoffensive ugly Christmas sweater - on it was depicted a Christmas scene which was surrounded by the Hanukkah symbol, with a Kwanza reminder and even a Winter Solstice symbol - all in an effort to be inclusive and inoffensive. But it was the most hideous piece of apparel ever, and offended everyone who saw it because it was too inclusive. What are we doing to Christmas?

Part 2: Contentment

- A former submarine officer who had served in the German Navy in World War I had changed careers and later became a German Church pastor. He served in the ministry until the Nazis took over Germany under Hitler. Then this minister was imprisoned by the Nazis for speaking against Hitler's lust for corruption and power. Imagine the former submarine officer being arrested by the government of the same nation for which he had fought just a few years ago. This Pastor wrote to his wife that he was more at peace than she might have thought. He told her that his life now resembled the fierce storms that he had encountered in the navy - the terrible turbulence on the surface, but incredible peace in the depths. This former submarine officer who was imprisoned as a pastor for speaking against the evil of this world said, "A threatened man can rejoice always only if there is something so deep in his life that it is beyond anything that circumstances can alter."
- This pastor learned the value of what the Apostle Paul wrote about in Philippians 4:11 (New International Version) which says: "*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content*

whatever the circumstances.”

- No matter how many times the world tries to change the Christmas story, the birth of a precious child, the Saviour of the world, still remains. The more that the world tries to create a celebration without the child born in a stable, the more the child shines through. The more people try to focus on the silly jingles of Christmas, the more empty they become compared to the Christmas Carols of Jesus, the Christ child, born in the lowly stable, as angels sang. No matter how much turbulence the world tries to throw at the celebration of Christmas, the deeper the real meaning grows.

Part 3: The Joy of the Hope of Christmas

- In the book of Philippians (4:4), Paul writes that we are to *"Rejoice in the Lord Always - Again, I say REJOICE!"* Rejoicing may seem unrealistic when a death has recently occurred, when finances are tight, when sickness is nearby, when there is hurt in the world and around the corner, when we think of the negatives in our lives and the crises and problems.
- But when we focus on the greatness of Jesus Christ, when we recline

in the beauty and wonder of the freedom in the love of God, when we see the result of the new creation which we have become through our Salvation in Jesus Christ, how can we do anything but Rejoice?

- "Praise the Lord," says a marvellous song, "Praise the Lord, Hosanna, the Saints are still singing, there are times that we see the things of this world, but He's still the king of Kings, and Lord of Lord!"
- Let your heart feel the joy and Hope of Christmas, as the Christ-child is the King of Kings, and the Lord of your life.

Conclusion:

- The newspaper was spread before me - I was behind, and I tried to catch up to a few days of world events. I read about politics - the threats within our country, and the strife in different parts of the world. I read of sexual crimes, of war and its numerous consequences. I read of robberies, of violence in so many ways. I became engrossed in the words of the editorials which argued heatedly against God and for the things of this world that are crass and debased. And as I read of the turmoil in this world, I felt miserable. Angry. Without hope. Without peace. And then the radio

played a sweet Christmas hymn. At first it seemed out of place - you see in the depth of pain and despair and evil of the stories in the newspaper where Christmas did not exist among the horrid news, the glorious proclamation of the joy of the birth of the Messiah seemed out of place. Among the guile of the world, the pure, innocent words of the birth of the Saviour did not seem to fit.

- And yet the words of that glorious Christmas Carol snapped me back to the "real world" in a hurry. I had become lost in the word of the world, and the Word of Jesus made me sit up straight. The words of that Christmas Carol of hope reminded me that the Real Reason for the Season is Jesus the Christ - the true bundle of Joy who brought the hope that we embrace as we celebrate at Christmas time.
- The world may be trying its desperate best to erase the Christ-child from Christmas. The world might be trying to erase the hope of Christmas. The world might be trying to remove the joy of the season of light, but that child cannot be removed. The world may hedge against the thought of Angels singing their praise over the joy of the Christ-child being born, but the angels are still singing the joy of the

proclamation of the birth of Jesus, the long awaited Messiah. The world may try to forget the journey of those who came to the Christ-child of old, but we must never forget to come to that same Christ-child today. The world may try to forget the virgin birth and try to erase Jesus just as Herod tried to erase all the children, but the Christ-child will always escape the sword of the world's anger and fear just as Jesus did that first Christmas. The world may have a problem finding any reason to rejoice this season, but because of the birth of that precious child in the meagre barn in a small town, and the life and atoning death of that Child, our Saviour's birth is something which will always allow us to *"Rejoice in the Lord always, again, I say REJOICE!"*