

Christmas Midnight 2011 - Joy

“Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people”.

Are we joyful this evening? Joy is a word that pops up often in our Christmas services. Isaiah announces that “You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest”. In the Psalm so beautifully sung by our choir King David declares “Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy”, and of course “good news of great joy” is at the heart of the angel’s message to the shepherds.

And then there are our carols; “joy to the world”, and “o come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant” – there is a veritable deluge of joy pouring out of our liturgy, but I repeat my question, are we joyful this evening?

Maybe you are. Maybe the music and the Christmas tree, and the sparkly lights and this beautiful building, and the magic that comes with doing all this so late at night – maybe all that has helped transport you to a happy, joyful place this evening, or maybe you’re just a naturally joyous person, good on you.

But maybe you’re not. Maybe for you this Christmas is bittersweet because someone special isn’t here. Maybe you come tonight bearing the burdens of a hard week at work, and business left undone that you really need to finish. Maybe you’ve come from an argument at home, or tension with the in-laws, or a health scare, or an ongoing medical condition, or perhaps you’re just plain tired. Maybe you’re worried about not having a job to go back to in January, or maybe you didn’t have one to start with. Maybe you’re worried about whether there’s enough dinner for tomorrow and did you get gifts for everyone. Maybe you’re upset about how much Christmas costs and what the credit card bill’s going to look like, or perhaps you’ve just had enough of the pre-Christmas madness. Maybe for you joy isn’t a word that sums up where you’re at tonight, and that’s ok too.

That’s ok because really it doesn’t matter how we’re feeling tonight, there’s joy here regardless.

“Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people”.

There’s a lot of joy in the Christmas story, and if we read on we find there’s a lot of joy in the scriptures period. Much later in the story the apostle Paul writes to a little church in Philippi and says to them “Rejoice in the Lord always” and what’s startling about that is that this was a church facing trouble and danger and persecution and even death, but Paul tells them to rejoice. He tells them to find and express joy even in the midst of their peril, even despite their problems, and he tells them they can do that because of tonight.

“Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people”.

There is a joy that we find spoken of in the Bible that is independent of our human experiences. This is a joy that does not depend on how we feel or what’s happening in our lives or whether we are happy or sad or angry or afraid. It’s a joy we hear about over and over and over again in the Bible and in each case they have two things in common; the

source of that joy is God and it comes to us through Jesus, and the beginning of all that is what we celebrate here and now.

“To you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

No matter how we feel, or what we're facing, or whatever is going on in our lives right now, in this we can find joy – God is with us. To us has been born a saviour, the messiah, and through him, with him, in him, we need never be afraid or alone. There is joy in that if we choose to find it, to grasp it, to claim it as our own. There is joy.

Thanks be to God.