

“Leap for joy!” Luke 1:39-45
3rd Sunday of Advent 12/12/04 Pastor Jon Bergemann

Come, come, Immanuel, and ransom us, the captive of Israel. Amen. The Word of God for our consideration this morning is found in Luke chapter one (read text). In the name of Jesus, our joy, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

My heart beat rapidly in anticipation. My eyes grew big. I had waited for over two hours in line at my local mall to meet someone who, I was convinced, would go down as one of the greatest football players to ever play the game. I was about to meet Tony Mandrich.

Now, if you don't know who Tony Mandrich is, I'm not surprised. After graduating from Michigan State as an all-American offensive lineman, he was the first round draft pick of the Green Bay Packers. In college he was huge. Agile. A terror on the field. Though he hadn't yet played in a professional game when I was to meet him, he seemed to me and many others to be a sure fire future Hall of Famer. In fact, he was even selected in the draft ahead of some guy named Barry Sanders.

Finally, the anticipation was over. I was next in line and approached his greatness. After a quick “hi” and an autograph, the moment was over. But I pondered it in my heart – I had just met a future hall of famer. I had just met greatness. I, a poor and humble sixth grader from Wauwatosa, Wisconsin had just met the great Tony Mandrich! Ah!! Who was I that Tony should be so gracious as to scribble his name on my newspaper clipping of him! How lucky I was! How full of joy I was!

Of course, as the years went on, Tony didn't turn out to be quite as great as I had hoped for. After a lack-luster few years with Packers, he was cut and just kind of disappeared. At last word, he was living by himself in a remote cabin in Canada shooting bear. So much for football greatness. So much for the joy of Tony Mandrich.

But such is life. Those we anticipate to do great things sometimes disappoint. Those who we wish desperately to place our hope and joy in some times turn out to be duds. Those we wish will give us joy are sometimes just another disappointment.

God's Old Testament people knew about disappointments. For generations, God had promised that a Savior would come to pay for their sins and fill them with joy. They waited eagerly throughout the ages. They had experienced many who claimed to be the promised Messiah but who turned out to be frauds. Generations had longed for his coming. Every one from Adam and Eve to Noah to Abraham to Isaiah had eagerly looked forward to his coming. All of creation since the beginning of time was anticipating his arrival.

Which is why, when a simple Israelite woman named Elizabeth is confronted with this promised Messiah, still in the womb of his mother Mary, she exclaims, **“Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”**

Elizabeth was meeting someone far greater than a football star! She was meeting God, still in the womb of Mary. Why should she get this opportunity? What was so special about her? Why should Jesus, even in the womb of his mother, come to her?

It's a good question. In fact, it's a question we might want to ask ourselves. Why would God want to meet with us? Why would God want to love us? Why would God want to take care of us? To look down from heaven on us? To come to this earth as a baby for us?

Is it because there is something good in us? No. God tells us that by nature we are dead in our transgressions and sins.

Is it because we have done something good for God? No. God tells us that perfection is the price to get into heaven on our own. We have not been perfect. Instead, our life is littered with sin.

Is it because we can give something back to God for all that He's done for us? No. God has everything. God is perfect. There is nothing that we could do or give to Him to repay Him for his love for us.

So why would God care about us? Why would we even be a thought in his all-knowing mind? Why?

Ah, that question and the answer to it form the basis for the real miracle of Christmas. You see, when we consider how sinful and weak we are and how perfect and powerful God is, we realize that there is no reason he should take notice of us. Who are we, that God should think about us?

And yet what did He do? He thought about us before we were even born. He thought about the path to hell that we were on. And he decided to act on those thoughts.

So he, the all powerful God of all creation, decided to come to earth as a little baby. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, he took residence in the womb of Mary. He was born into this cruel, cold world. He experienced every pain and pressure of this life, perfectly for us. And then He gave His life on the cross to pay for our sins. He rose from the dead to prove those sins are paid for. That's what the most powerful, mighty, awesome, incredible, fantastic, wonderful person who ever lived and ever will live did for you.

But we still haven't answered that question of "why?", have we? We still haven't conceived in our minds why God would do all this for us. As we stand next to Elizabeth, we are still asking, "Why should I be so favored to meet God?"

Why would God do this for us? Why would he come as a baby in Bethlehem? The answer: we will never fully understand. We can never fully understand the depth of love in our God's heart that would prompt him to pay for us, who could never pay him back, with his life. We can never fully understand the depth of love he has for us that he would give up the glory of heaven to walk humbly on earth in our place. We can never fully understand the depth of love he has for us that would make him want to spend the holidays and eternity with us as our God. God's love which prompted him to come to this earth for us is beyond our comprehension. We won't ever fully grasp how deep his love is for us. Isn't that wonderful?

In fact, it's so wonderful that we do know exactly what we can do in response to this love. We see it exhibited in John, Elizabeth's son still in her womb. When he, still in the womb, hears the voice of Mary who is carrying the Son of God in her womb, he leaped for joy!

Why? Jesus was here! His Savior was here! He could leap for joy!

Is it any different for you or me? We might not be in the womb of our mother's any more, though on some tough days in this life we might want to go back there. But look who comes to us in his Word! It is Jesus! In the Word you hear the voice of your Savior. Leap for joy!

And what does he say? He says that he loved you enough to walk on this earth for you. That he knows exactly every pain or pressure you face. That he knows everything you are going through. Leap for joy!

And what else does he say? He says that he loved you enough to give his life for you. Leap for joy!

And he says that he loved you enough to go to heaven and prepare a place for you. Leap for joy!

And he says that he loves you enough to work out all things for your good, even when you don't understand how that all happens. Leap for joy!

Your life is full of joy!! Oh, does that mean that you will always be happy? No. Understand that happiness is something different than joy. Happiness is a feeling that can go up or down. If it's a sunny day you might be happy, if it's a cloudy day you might be sad. If you get that new video game for Christmas you might be happy, if all you get is coal you might be sad. Happiness goes up and down in our lives.

But joy is something we can have all the time. You see, joy is the knowledge of what God has done for us. And what God has done for us can not be changed.

God came as a baby in a manger for us. That can't be changed. You can't put him back in Mary's womb. He came for you. Leap for joy!

God gave his life for you and paid for every one of your sins. That can't be changed. The cross and the tomb are empty. He lived and died for you. Leap for joy!

God will walk with you through every step of this life. He will dry your tears, He will calm your fears. He loves you perfectly. Leap for joy!

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12368 Dillingham Square • Woodbridge, VA 22912
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God will take you home to heaven. And can you even imagine the joy of meeting him face to face? After standing through the long line of pain and suffering of this earth, can you even imagine what it will be like when our line of life ends on this earth and we enter eternity! When we look at God face to face!

And what will he do? Give us a quick autograph and send us away? No way. He'll wrap us in his arms and say, "Welcome home, my child. You heard my voice throughout your life. I was always with you, in the good times and bad times. I knew everything you were going through, and I was working it all out for your good. I was making sure that we would meet here in heaven. Your pains are gone. Eternal joy is yours!"

We have heard the voice of God and we will hear his voice forever in heaven. We have seen his coming here on earth and we will see his coming again. We have felt his love in our lives and we will feel it forever in heaven. What should we do in response? Let's join John and leap for joy! Amen.