

Christmas Brings Joy

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Date: 22 November 2020

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[0 : 0 0] can i add my welcome to david's earlier i'm jonathan minister of christ church glasgow well do keep your bible open at those verses read to us from luke chapter one well last week it was reported that on the bbc website that the uk is streaming christmas songs earlier than ever the report says that we're getting into the christmas spirit earlier each year judging by the music that we are buying and streaming apparently mariah carey's festive hit all i want for christmas is you returned to spotify's top 40 earlier than any other year this year and it's currently among the uk's top 50 downloads all i want for christmas is you i checked earlier it's number 31 in the uk singles chart you're welcome but it's not just mariah all i want for christmas is you that is storming the charts right now the music charts are filling up with all kinds of christmas songs like quam's last christmas like the pogues fairy tale of new york like the pogues fairy tale of new york right on woke version and even michael bubbley's it's beginning to look a lot like christmas and so we're ramping up the christmas music yesterday in my own house my 11 year old daughter said alexa play some christmas music to which the rest of the family said alexa stop and so christmas music is here to stay whether we like it or not at least for the next 33 days anyway and so what is it about christmas music because it generally lacks lyrical quality even musical quality it is soppy and it is sentimental and it is cheesy but we still love it and it's not just christmas pop music either we can't get enough of classic christmas carols they're blaring out in all the shops i was in a shop last saturday first shop i've been in for eight months and they were playing christmas carols even richard dawkins the well-known atheist admits that he enjoys singing traditional christmas carols every single year and so we all enjoy a bit of christmas music don't we and why is that well perhaps it's because the songs of christmas give some expression to the longings and aspirations of our hearts because deep down we do long for love joy peace and hope all through the year and christmas songs seem to in some sense capture what we want to have in our lives but also in our world because that's what all these christmas songs seem to promise isn't it in one way or another our culture is looking for the satisfaction of these longings love joy peace hope and it's not wrong to long for all of these things but no matter how hard we try we'll always fail to be satisfied if we're looking in the wrong places and that's why the message of christmas is such good news for us because it tells us that our deepest longings for love joy peace hope can only find satisfaction in jesus christ and so what we're going to do in church over these next five sundays is spend some time looking at the very first songs of christmas songs that were sung for the birth of jesus christ songs that sing of a savior who truly satisfies the deepest longings and aspirations of our hearts and we find these songs in the opening chapters of the gospel of luke chapters one and two now if you're unfamiliar with the bible luke is one of four historical accounts of the birth and life and death of jesus christ and one of the fascinating literary features of the gospel of luke is the way that in

his in his narrative he weaves together songs throughout the story of jesus's birth and so luke records the original and the best christmas songs and he gives us a classic christmas playlist a playlist of songs sung by ordinary people whose lives were caught up in the extraordinary story of the first christmas and so in luke's classic christmas playlist we've got elizabeth's song the song we're thinking about today we've got mary's song sometimes called the magnificat we've got zechariah's song sometimes called the benedictus we've got the angel song sometimes called the gloria in excelsis and we've got simeon's song its latin name is the nunc dimittis and their songs sung before during and after the birth of jesus christ and their lyrics come from the depths of the old testament and they promise a coming savior and they pronounce his birth and they proclaim the hope that he gives for the future they're really an expression of god's saving work pointing to jesus the savior of the world and so whether you're here today or watching online and you're not quite sure where you stand when it comes to christianity then this christmas playlist from luke isn't just a

playlist to be playing in the background while we get on with their busy lives no it's here for us to listen to because when we hear the lyrics and we discover that we can change our lives then our heart will beat to a different tune the tune of our life will change forever and so the first song on the christmas playlist comes from elizabeth luke chapter 1 verse 39 to 45 now elizabeth was the elderly mother of john the baptist and her song is easily overlooked and even by the commentators in the bible because it's one of the shortest songs recorded and yet it is bursting with christmas joy so we're going to look at that today and we see three things we see how the coming of jesus gives extraordinary joy how the coming of jesus gives ultimate joy and how the coming of jesus gives personal joy extraordinary joy ultimate joy and personal joy so first of all the coming of jesus gives extraordinary joy that's the first thing that stands out in these verses but notice that the extraordinary joy doesn't come from elizabeth it comes from the baby in her womb now the backstory is that an angel of the lord appeared to zechariah who was married to elizabeth the author of the song and the angel told zechariah that elizabeth would have a son and he was to be called john and john john the baptist would prepare people for jesus but zechariah didn't believe the angel's words because he and elizabeth were very old and yet elizabeth became pregnant with john just as the angel gabriel said then next god sent gabriel the angel to visit the virgin mary and mary was told that she'd give birth to a son and he was to be called jesus the son of god mary was also told that her relative elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy and so we pick up the story with mary hurrying off to visit elizabeth and luke tells us verse 41 when elizabeth heard mary's greeting the baby leaped in her womb and elizabeth was filled with the holy spirit and so the meeting of these women results in extraordinary joy not just because mary greets elizabeth but because elizabeth's baby greets mary's baby now luke doesn't tell us how elizabeth knew mary was pregnant with this child and there's no indication that mary told elizabeth beforehand she couldn't send a message with an ultrasound scan picture because they didn't have smartphones in those days but i suspect that it has something to do with elizabeth being filled with the holy spirit not only that elizabeth's baby was also filled with the holy spirit because earlier in luke's gospel chapter 1 verse 15 we're told that john would be filled with the holy spirit even before birth and so it's john's antenatal experience of the spirit that results in his response in the womb and it's a miraculous expression of extraordinary joy and elizabeth explains this later in her own words in verse 44 she says as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears the baby in my womb leaped for joy so even before elizabeth responded to mary's words her unborn child leapt for joy in the womb now john the baptist was literally jumping for joy when the unborn jesus came near now children all enjoy a good play date and one of the commentators suggests that this is the nearest thing that we get to a play date in the womb we could even say that john the baptist's ministry kicks off in the womb and it's amazing john's public ministry was to prepare people for jesus and to point people to jesus but long before john's public ministry john's got this private ministry because as he leaps for joy he's pointing us to jesus i guess you could even call it the very first christmas song and dance routine because john jumps for joy and elizabeth sings for joy as they both encounter jesus christ but this is no pantomime because if you're new to christianity or if you've never heard these details of the christmas story before you'd be right to think that this isn't normal this kind of thing doesn't normally happen and yet we shouldn't be surprised by these miraculous events that surround the birth of jesus christ because after all god is sending his son into the world and so the supernatural conception of jesus to the virgin mary is extraordinary because the birth of jesus is the most significant event in the history of the world and so it's hardly surprising that it would have supernatural miraculous extraordinary events occurring around about it because we're not talking about the realm of fantasy here about the kind of once upon a time stuff we're talking about the events of history actually about the events in time by which we set our time so whenever we look at our clock or our watch or our smartphone to check the time we're going by the time that jesus christ lived in this world because luke remember was a historian and in the opening words of his gospel luke chapter 1 verse 1 to 4 luke makes it clear to us that he is reporting the facts of what actually happened so luke had gone to his primary sources to the eyewitnesses to listen to what they had to say and then he carefully investigated everything from the very beginning because he wanted to write an orderly account for his friend theophilus and this guy theophilus and therefore the rest of luke's readers luke is writing because he wants us to know with absolute certainty that the things he says about jesus christ can be trusted that the things he claims about jesus are true from his birth here in the early chapters of luke's gospel throughout his life to his death on

a cross and then his resurrection from the dead luke is saying i've checked these things out with the eyewitnesses and these things happened but as well as being a careful historian luke was also a clued-in doctor and so if there is anyone in the ancient world qualified to report on a pregnancy then it's luke and that's why we can be sure that what he says about these pregnant women isn't just recorded with careful historical accuracy but with considered medical knowledge and that's why the extraordinary joy of john leaping in his mother's womb is there for our benefit to show us that the joy that john had when he encountered jesus is the same joy that we can have as we encounter jesus so that joy of the first christmas the true joy of christmas can be ours as we come near to jesus too and so let's look further at the reason for this joy so that's the first point extraordinary joy second point is ultimate joy and the reason for this ultimate joy is expressed in elizabeth's song so luke tells us verse 42 and 43 in a loud voice she exclaimed that's elizabeth blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear but why am i so favored that the mother of my lord should come to me now we can't be sure how much elizabeth understood but her song is a song of joyful praise and that's why she cries out in a loud voice firstly by saying blessed are you among women and this is the sense of among all women you're the most blessed that's really what she's saying and so to be blessed means to receive special favor from god and that's mary she is especially blessed because of the child she bears which is the second part of elizabeth's song blessed is the child you will bear so the child is blessed because of his unique person and work he is at the very center of god's purposes for world history and elizabeth is aware of this because she says but why am i so favored that the mother of my lord should come to me so elizabeth knew the identity of mary's unborn son see what she called him she called him my lord and so we shouldn't miss the significance of her words because she is declaring that the child to be born is the long promised messiah and so her words probably allude to one of the old testament psalms that speaks about the messiah psalm 110 it's a psalm of david and it begins with these words the lord says to my lord sit at my right hand until i make your enemies a footstool for your feet the lord says to my lord so david speaks about two lords one is the lord god and the other is the messiah whom david calls my lord and so the psalm is clearly speaking of jesus prophesying jesus as the lord who sits at the right hand of the lord god in fact jesus applied these words to himself later on in luke's gospel luke chapter 20 but here this is elizabeth's confession of faith she's the first person in the gospel of luke to refer to jesus as lord he's the lord the long promised messiah and he has arrived and elizabeth is aware that she is in his presence her lord has come to her and that's why she sings for joy she got a front row seat to watch god's great plan unfolding and taking shape before her very eyes the lord of all eternity was about to break into this world and that's why christmas brings ultimate joy it's because jesus christ has come as lord and as savior now right now in our society there is a lot of talk by politicians about saving christmas they want to save christmas for us so we have a lockdown before christmas which frees christmas up and we can enjoy it it's been saved and so all of these restrictions come to our country but we don't save christmas we can't save christmas but the amazing message of christianity that we're learning here in the gospel of luke is that christmas saves us that's the reason for elizabeth's joy because when we realize who burst into our world on that first christmas and what he came to do for us then we discover the source of ultimate joy i love the way that thomas watson one of the puritan preachers describes this in his book a body of divinity let me quote he says he was poor that he might make us rich he was born of a virgin that we might be born of god he took our flesh that he might give us his spirit he lay in the manger that we might lie in paradise he came down from heaven that he might bring us to heaven and then he goes on behold here is a sacred riddle or paradox god manifest in the flesh that man should be made in god's image was a wonder but that god should be made in man's image is a greater wonder that the ancient of days should be born that he who thunders in the heavens should cry in the cradle that he who rules the stars should suck the breast that a virgin should conceive that christ should be made of a woman and of that woman which himself made that the branch should bear the vine that the mother should be younger than the child she bear and that the child in the womb bigger than the mother that the human nature should not be god yet one with god christ taking flesh is a mystery we shall never fully understand till we come to heaven so can you see that's why jesus is the source of ultimate joy for our lives because he came as lord and savior to bring us into a relationship with our creator god and that's why we'll never find ultimate joy in life until we're in a right relationship with the god who made us and that's not to say we can't find joy in other things of course we can and we should but just take elizabeth for example elizabeth is going to have a baby a cause of great celebration and joy and wonder and yet as good as this is

elizabeth knew that ultimate joy true joy lasting joy wasn't found in her having a baby but it was found in the baby who was her lord and so how do we make this ultimate joy our own well we've seen the extraordinary joy and we've seen the ultimate joy well thirdly jesus coming gives personal joy we can know ultimate personal joy the same way elizabeth and mary did and that is through believing see what elizabeth said about mary verse 45 blessed is she who has believed that the lord would fulfill his promises to her so here is elizabeth

[20 : 23] paying tribute to mary's faith because mary believed god would fulfill his promises to her what are god's promises to her well basically everything in chapter 1 verse 31 to 35 everything conveyed to mary by the angel gabriel so mary believed god would do all that he'd said and so she shows the only proper response to the coming of jesus her belief in fact contrasts with the doubt that was displayed by elizabeth's husband zechariah zechariah at this stage in the story still couldn't speak because of his unbelief because he was rebuked for failing to believe god will fulfill his promises to him that's why the angel gabriel said to zechariah chapter 1 verse 20 and now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens because you did not believe my words which will come true at their appointed time so in contrast to zechariah's disbelief what we've got is mary's belief and it's held up to us as an example and that's why elizabeth concludes her song saying mary is blessed for believing god's word to her and that is the lesson for us because if we are going to experience the joy of christmas personally like mary then we must believe what god says about his son jesus that is the only proper response now today so many people say that they can never believe christianity they've got too many questions too many doubts that stop them believing that christianity is true and you may know people like that or you may even be that person where you've got the skeptical approach to christianity and you can't believe some of its claims and you can't believe something like a virgin birth sounds too far-fetched sounds just too difficult to believe well just hang on a minute think about mary what about mary the virgin birth was just as inconceivable to mary as it is for modern people today and yet mary believed that what god said would happen would happen even if she couldn't fully grasp how mary believed god's words and was willing to bank her life on what god said as being true and it wasn't easy for her it wasn't easy just think about it in believing god's promises mary had to say what she does in verse 38 she had to say god do whatever you want to do with my life so she was prepared to give up everything for god remember she was pledged to be married to joseph verse 27 tells us that and in matthew's account of the birth of jesus joseph thought about divorcing mary until an angel told him not to and so mary's belief mary and her step of faith mary's belief meant being prepared to give up the security of marriage and become an unmarried teenage mom and perhaps that's not too big a deal today but it was a huge scandal back then and so mary was prepared to give up her reputation she was willing to be risked willing to be labeled as the one with the illegitimate child and actually that happened because later in life they spoke about jesus as if they didn't know who his father was and so however mary's life would turn out misunderstanding disgrace shame mary believed that god would keep his word and elizabeth assures her that she would be

blessed because of it and so when you see mary's readiness to believe saying today two thousand years later that it's hard to believe in christianity well it isn't such a great excuse anymore when you see how hard it was for mary and yet she still believed and so it's as we you and me as we take god at his word and believe all he says that's how we will find blessing and joy in life and this lovely meeting between these two pregnant women shows us this they knew the blessing and joy of being caught up in what god was doing at the time but we can still know the same blessing and joy of christmas even though we live over two thousand years after these events took place because the coming of jesus is joy to the world because when we believe all that god has said about jesus then we also can get caught up in god's purposes for this world because when we confess our faith in jesus by calling him my lord then we submit ourselves to his rule and then we become a part of his everlasting kingdom and so we can experience ultimate joy and ultimate blessing by becoming part of god's amazing salvation story and when we're part of it that is when our hearts will leap for joy and our lips will cry out in song because jesus has come to us the lord jesus left his throne in heaven to enter the womb of a young woman in israel he became a man in order to die so that we can be saved and so the baby who was laid in a crude wooden box became the savior laid out on a cruel wooden cross and so if you don't yet believe all that god has spoken about jesus then can i encourage you to engage your mind to engage your mind and to consider the coming of jesus christ even better believe that's what mary did she believed and we need to believe to believe and open

up your heart to the ultimate personal joy that is found in jesus christ because it's what you've been longing for your whole life even if you never realized it so don't miss out on the joy that jesus christ brings let's pray together thank you our god for sending your son into this world we thank you for christmas and for how christmas brings joy joy that can be found in the lord and savior jesus christ we thank you for him for his willingness to come for his willingness to live and die on a cross so that we might be brought into a relationship with you and experience your blessing now and your joy that lasts forever so we thank you for the good news of christmas and we pray that this christmas season that good news would sink deeper and deeper into our hearts that the tune of our lives would be lived out in a different way because we know the reason for the season in jesus and we pray in jesus name amen you