

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Mary and The Shepherds*

**SERIES:** *The Christmas Story*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Luke 2*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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*\*Credit to Bible Gateway; Ken Bailey; Tim Keller;*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church those of you here in the room and also to those of watching on the livestream. Over the last few weeks we've been we've working our way through the major passages of Scripture that tell us **The Christmas Story (GRAPHIC)**.

We've looked at the ancient prophecy from **Isaiah 9**...to us a child is born, to us a son is given. We've looked at **Matthew 1** and the messy people that Jesus included in his genealogy. You'll never hear the name "Tamar" the same way, ever again, will you? Messy people like you and me, adopted into his family. And then last week we looked at **Matthew 2** and the story of King Herod and the Wise Men who bring gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Kind of humorous, after my message on Sunday a friend sent me this **image**... it says, *"After the three wise men left, the three wise women arrived with gifts of: Baby formula, diapers, meals for the week.*

Much more useful for a young mother and child.

This morning we turn our attention to **Luke 2**. And a somewhat more familiar part of the Christmas story than the passages we've looked at so far. In fact, as you'll see today, Luke 2, is typically what we think of when we think of "The Christmas Story"...

In just a moment, I'm gonna read a little bit of this story to us, and then, once again, we'll just talk about what it means for us. But before I do, kind of an important question that I'd like us to begin thinking about, related to our advent theme for today, **JOY**. I want to start with this, because it's just really important for the world in which we live in today. The question is...

## **I. WHERE DO YOU FIND JOY?**

I'm not talking about superficial joy. I'm not talking about momentary feelings of happiness because your football team won or you hit all the green lights on your way through town or all the socks in the laundry basket came out with a matching pair. I'm talking about that deep-seated, persistent kind of joy that exists within your soul whether things are going well for you or not.

**Joy is not a passing sensation of pleasure, but a pervasive sense of well-being that is infused with hope because of the goodness of God.** (Willard)

In other words, in a world in which we see and experience pain and brokenness, violence and turmoil...you can experience a sense of security and contentment because you trust that God will one day redeem the brokenness and set all things right.

Where do you find that kind of joy?

The Good News of the Christmas story is that your search for joy is not hopeless. The Christmas story teaches that true joy can be yours. Ok, so let's read this together. I want you to listen carefully, attentively, pay attention, soak in this part of the Christmas story...see if you can find the answer to our question. Luke 2...

**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.**

**<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up...to Bethlehem...<sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, ...<sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger...**

**<sup>8</sup> And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them...and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.**

**<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”**

**<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**

Did you catch it? Did you listen well? Right at the center of the Christmas Story...the Angel speaking to the Shepherds, says it so plainly. **“I bring you Good News that will cause great joy for all people...”**

All people can find great joy. You can find great joy. Not the passing sensation of pleasure, not momentary happiness...the Christmas story says, you can have “a pervasive sense of well-being that is infused with hope.”

Where do you find it? The angel tells us.

**11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.**

Where do you find joy? In

**A. Jesus.**

Nowhere else.

It's important, because, as human beings we tend to build our lives around the kinds of things that we believe will lead us into a life of JOY. We live in a world full of joy-seekers. *"I want to be happy, I want to be content, when I get to the end of my life, I want to be satisfied."*

But the truth is many of us don't know where to find that kind of joy.

If you take a look in your bulletin, there is a list of categories. And I would just like you to take a moment and rate each of those categories, from 1-10. 10 being "This area of my life gives me a pervasive sense of joy" and 1 being "This area of my life is a cause of great frustration."

**Occupation/Job**

**Income**

**Home**

**Singleness/Marriage** – If you're sitting beside your spouse, you have permission to lie on the survey☺

**Health**

**Family**

**Schedule/routine**

**Overall circumstances and condition of your life.**

And maybe we'll add one more category on there...your pastor...how satisfied are you with your pastor...I'm just kidding. Some of you were just way too eager about that suggestion...how many 10's do you have on your list?

Now, don't hear me wrong. All of these categories can and should be a part of the joy we experience in life. Your job, and your family and your health all contribute to the sense of joy you experience, your contentment and satisfaction in life. But none of them can fully deliver a pervasive sense of well-being, constant and un-ending. Because each of these categories, in some way, at some time, will let us down.

Society feeds on this dissatisfaction in our lives. All day long we are bombarded with messages trying to persuade us that we are (or ought to be) unhappy and that joy is only one step away. You have seen the advertisements... "use me, buy me, eat me, wear me, try me, drive me, put me in your hair." And then you will find the joy you seek. John Ortberg writes...

It is staggering, the things you can buy for hair contentment alone: You can wash it, condition it, mousse it, dye it, curl it, straighten it, wax it if it's growing where it shouldn't, and Rogaine it if it's not growing where it should.

People are healthier, cleaner, richer, and better informed than ever. We live longer, eat better, dress warmer, work less, and play more than ever in the history of the human race. But are we content? Or are we just cleaner, healthier, wealthier discontents?

(Love Beyond Reason, John Ortberg)

How often have you thought to yourself, "Buy this. Have this. Accumulate more. Then you'll really be happy." And for a little while, it works doesn't it? New car, new phone, new gadget, new toy...happy for a little while. But it never lasts.

I have this sneaking suspicion that many of us go through life seeking to find our pervasive sense of well-being, persistent joy, **in those categories listed in the bulletin**, but none of them fully deliver.

But notice the Angel didn't say:

"I bring you good news of great joy...

You will experience perfect health this year.

You will not have any frustrations at work this year.

Your children will obey everything you tell them to do this year.

Your family will not experience any fighting this year.

Your bank account will grow three sizes this year!

The angel teaches us something very different at Christmas...**"I bring you Good News that will cause great joy for all people...<sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you...**

This is why, just on a really practical level, it's so important to be thoughtful at Christmas time, when it comes to our

### **B. Gift giving.**

And here's what I mean. Gift-giving is a good thing. I've been part of church groups at times, that kind of condemn the whole gift giving idea as frivolous and worldly. But gift-giving at Christmas can be a reflection of God's heart.

**For God so loved the world that he gave...**

But so often the commercialization at Christmas time encourages an attitude of **accumulation rather than giving.**

We place the emphasis on the wrong thing. And that's where we tend to miss the mark. *"If I get lots, if I have lots, if I buy lots...then I'll be happy."* We place the

emphasis on the accumulating rather than the giving. But Jesus says the opposite is true when it comes to joy... Acts 20...**'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'** ”

The Apostle Paul also talks about this concept, he says...

**2 Corinthians 9:7 - <sup>7</sup> Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**

The word **cheerful** here, is the greek word **hilaros** from which we get our English word hilarious. That's the emotion you should begin to experience in giving. It's an exercise in joy and laughter.

Paul connects giving/generosity...not accumulation...to joy.

In fact, interesting thought, when you look at the number of times certain words are used in the Bible **“Belief/faith – 272 times; Pray – 371 times; Love – 741 times; the word give is in the Bible 2,162 times”**.

**The level of joy you experience in life, is related more to giving than accumulating.**

My hope is that as we think about Christmas, as we share in our times of gift-giving...this would be our emphasis as well.

Ok, if Jesus is the source of true joy, how do we receive the joy of Jesus into our everyday lives? And the answer might surprise you, but the concept is found all throughout the Christmas story. The answer is in...

### **C. Listening well.**

Notice how the theme of listening shows up throughout the passage...

**<sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them...and said...<sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you...**

“They said, that’s nice, but we’re too busy, that’s not exciting enough, can you please go tell someone who cares!” No, what did the Shepherds do?

**<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph...**

The Shepherds heard the message of Jesus birth from the angels, and they listened well. It didn’t pass in one ear and out the other. They weren’t too busy, they weren’t distracted. They processed what they heard. To the degree that they determined they must go and see for themselves if what they heard was true.

Max Lucado...**Had the angel gone to theologians, they would have first consulted their commentaries. Had he gone to the elite, they would have looked around to see if anyone was watching. Had he gone to the successful, they would have first looked at their calendars. So he went to shepherds—Men who didn't have a reputation to protect or an ax to grind or a ladder to climb. Men who didn't know enough to tell God that angels don't sing to sheep and that messiahs aren't found wrapped in rags and sleeping in a feed trough.**

Shepherds in ancient Israel would have been near the bottom of the social ladder. They were often uneducated, would have been considered unclean. They would not have been accepted at the Temple or places of worship. But the News of Jesus birth was given first to them, perhaps because Jesus knew they would listen well.

The Shepherds found joy that first Christmas night, by listening well.

And it turns out, you find this concept all throughout the Bible. Listening well is a crucial characteristic of God’s people.



The center piece of Jewish prayer life was something called the “**Shema**”... It begins with the word Hear... “**Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.**” Jewish children are taught to say these words every morning and every evening. From sunrise to sunset their lives are to be marked by “attentive listening.”

The Apostle Paul says the same thing in [Romans 10](#) - “**17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.**”

In fact, you become a disciple of Jesus first, by listening well. Think about it, over and over again as Jesus is recruiting his group of disciples, he calls them, “**Come, follow me.**” And in that moment those disciples must choose to hear/listen to Jesus or not.

I was thinking that in our world, **selective hearing** is a common phrase we use. *Selective hearing* means we listen to parts of the conversation that we like, the parts that are interesting to us, the parts that speak highly of us but we tend reject, ignore, discount the rest, because it’s boring or uninteresting or challenging to us.

In fact someone I know has a t-shirt that says, on one side “**I suffer from selective hearing...**” and then on the back it says, “**...and you have not been selected.**”

There are a lot of people who think about Jesus in this manner. The message of Jesus is uninteresting to me, church is too boring for me, the teachings of Jesus are too challenging for me...and so we ignore, reject, overlook Jesus.

It’s a selective hearing problem.

We like the idea of Jesus because he was such a nice guy. He was generous and compassionate and forgiving. We like all of those things. We like the idea of Jesus

saving us from our sin. We'd like to be associated with a guy like that, so we call our ourselves Christians.

But to make Jesus our savior and Lord. To say that we are going to "give him our life and build our life around him. To learn his teachings and put them into practice."

We don't want to heart that!

But you see, one of the central character traits of people who begin to experience the true joy of Jesus in their lives is listening well.

Those Shepherds that night, when they heard the Messiah was born, **"They hurried off to find him... and after they had met Jesus, we are told they <sup>20</sup>...returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.**

So, how do we listen well? Again, the Christmas teaches us. Look at verse 19.

**<sup>19</sup> Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.**

Two things Mary teaches us about listening well. Listening well involves...

### **1. Pondering**

Which in some ways is like an old school word, that we don't often use anymore, but it means to **think deeply** or to think through something using your mind and your intellect.

C.S. Lewis once wrote that...**God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than of any other slackers. If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you, you are embarking on something which is going to take the whole of you, brains and all.**

Pondering involves what we call **head knowledge**.

Let me give you an example of head knowledge, I'll just use my wife Jenny. Head knowledge about Jenny would be things like...

Jenny is a Home Ec. teacher at the Waynesboro High school.

Jenny is a mom of three kids.

Jenny's favorite Christmas activity is crying through sappy hallmark movies.

Jenny has brown hair.

Jenny has brown eyes.

Jenny is 39 years old.

Jenny weighs...hahahaha...I'm just kidding.

It's head knowledge. Head knowledge is just so important. We live life based on the knowledge that we have about life and the world around us.

Pondering is when we use our minds to think through facts and information. Mary had to think through the fact that her child was being described as the long-awaited Messiah. *"Could this actually be true? And, if it is true, then what does that mean exactly for her life and his life in the days ahead?"*

There's a Christmas song, sometimes overplayed this time of year, to the degree that it's easy to dismiss the significance of the lyrics. The song is called "**Mary, did you know?**" This is a song all about pondering Jesus. Pause for a moment and allow these thought to sink into your mind:

**"Did you know your baby boy would walk on water?"**

**"Did you know your baby boy will give sight to a blind man."**

**"Did you know your baby boy has walked where angels trod."**

**"Did you know your baby boy is Lord of all creation?"**

**“When you kiss your little baby, you’ve kissed the face of God.”**

The baby born in a manger in Bethlehem, is God in human flesh. If that’s true and if you allow your mind to ponder that fact, it changes how you think about Jesus, about Christmas and about your own life, and what you’re trying to get out of life and where you find joy.

Maybe this is the place that you’re at in your own journey with Jesus. You’ve heard his name before, you’ve heard people talk about him before, you kind of like the idea of Jesus...but you’ve never allowed your mind to ponder the significance of Jesus.

Folks, if you’ve never done that before, that might be where your own journey towards true joy begins. You have to set aside the distractions of life, you have to give your focused minds attention, to the idea that Jesus just might be the actual son of God in human flesh. If He is, if it’s true, then the smartest thing you could possibly do...they wisest decision you could ever make for your life...is to give your life to Jesus.

Mary then teaches us the second part of listening well...

## **2. Treasure what you learn.**

### **Mary treasured up all these things**

Not only did Mary ponder, but she treasured what she heard.

This expression has more to do with your emotions and your heart than it does your mind and your intellect. It means to keep something alive or to savor it.

The idea here is that Mary doesn’t just intellectually receive the information about Jesus, she internalizes it.

## **Psalm 119:11 – I have hidden your word in my heart...**

So for example if you ever learned how to drive a stick shift vehicle. It's one thing for someone to give you the instructions about how to do it. That's head knowledge, and it's very important, but it's very different to actually sit down in the vehicle and put that knowledge into practice, that's to internalize it. To experience the information in action. To feel what it feels like.

Treasuring has more to do with that second aspect. When we treasure Jesus and his teachings we start to think things like:

**How would my life be different if I really believed Jesus is Lord, from the bottom of my heart?**

**How would this change my thinking, feeling, actions?**

**How would it change my relationships?**

So, have you thought through this...what if you lived your life treasuring the teachings of Jesus:

**It is better to give than to receive.**

**For in the same way you forgive others, you will be forgiven.**

**A gentle answer, turns away wrath...**

**Do not lust...**

**Do not store up treasures on earth...**

**Love your enemies and do good to those who persecute you...**

If you do not listen well, if you do not ponder and treasure Jesus...then his story, his life, his teachings, will not sink in into your heart and you will not change...and you will always be searching for true joy.

This is a challenging message isn't it? It's a stark reminder that Christmas isn't mostly about sentimental experiences and family traditions. It's not mostly about making sure we sing our favorite Christmas carols or watch our favorite Christmas movies. To listen well, means we can't treat the Christmas story as "the same old story" we hear every year. "Oh that's nice, read Luke 2 again. Show me some pictures of the manger scene so that we can get on with our lives."

Pondering and treasuring the Christmas story will begin to change how we live our lives. And this why finally, listening well ultimately leads to

### **3. Obedience.**

Notice, again, the Shepherds heard the message...and then they acted upon it. "They hurried off to find Mary and Joseph."

It's because listening well to Jesus, leads to obedience to Jesus. In fact in the Bible, listening is always connected to obedience.

I shared earlier that the Hebrew word for hearing or listening is the word **shema**. Interestingly, did you know that in Hebrew there is no separate word for obedience? In Hebrew culture, listening and obeying are the same thing.

Here's just one example from Exodus 19.

**Exodus 19:5 - Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.**

The word translated as **obey** in this passage, is the word **shema**...the word for hearing. Listening is the same as keeping the covenant or obedience to Jesus.

You haven't fully listened until you have acted on what was spoken to you. That means that our concept of selective listening does not exist according to the Biblical understanding.

Jesus uses a similar concept at the end of his most famous sermon in **Matthew 5-7**, the sermon on the mount. He says, **“whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is a wise person.”**

Some of you are familiar with the hymn “trust and obey”...do you remember this line? **There is no other way to be happy (joyous) than...to trust and obey.**

Jesus actually says something very similar in **John 15 - <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love...<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**

Do you see the connection between obedience to Jesus and joy?

So often we want true joy our way. We think we'll find it in our hobbies, our health, our families, our Christmas gifts...But the Christmas story more than anything perhaps, reminds us we don't just get to decide what kind of joy we want. We must be filled with God's joy. That starts with obedience to Jesus. And that starts by listening well.

So, as we close, listen well to these final words...

**“An Angel appeared to them and said...I bring you Good News that will cause great joy for all people...<sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you...”**