

# THE HEART OF CHRISTMAS

Written by Trevor Miller. Published by OUTREACH  
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## The Heart of Christmas Brings Joy In All Circumstances

**John 1:14 // Romans 5:8 // 1 John 4:9**

*14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

~ John 1:14 ~

The circumstances of life have a way of robbing us of our joy. Disappointment, frustration, and loss can suck the very life from us. However, Jesus' birth reminds us that no matter how hard life can become, we don't have to go through it alone. God has come to us full of grace and truth, which should bring us joy. We can trust that Jesus' presence with us will reveal the truth about our lives and, at the same time, will offer us the grace to see things change.

**Think:** Jesus is committed to being honest with us about what we need to repent from. He is also committed to extending grace and mercy to remind us that we are loved beyond measure.

**Feel:** God wanted to be near to us in order to rescue us. The arrival of Jesus brings us joy because He is the very presence of the divine.

**Do:** Receive the correction of God through Christ. At the same time receive the grace of God through Christ.

The countdown has begun as we quickly move toward Christmas Day and the celebration of the birth of Jesus! It is easy to get lost in all the gifts, decorations, and parties and miss the central focus of Christmas. Jesus was born to bring hope, peace, joy, and love, which is the real reason for this season. In the first lesson, we learned that we are offered hope in the middle of our circumstances because of God's faithfulness. Last week, we looked at the wonderful gift of peace that Jesus's sacrifice makes

available to us. Christ makes us right with God, ourselves, and others. This week, we introduce one more piece of the heart of Christmas: a joy that is ours, no matter the circumstances.

Our joy in life is primarily connected to the circumstances in our lives. When things are going well, we feel good. We feel bad when things are going poorly—our joy ebbs and flows. I

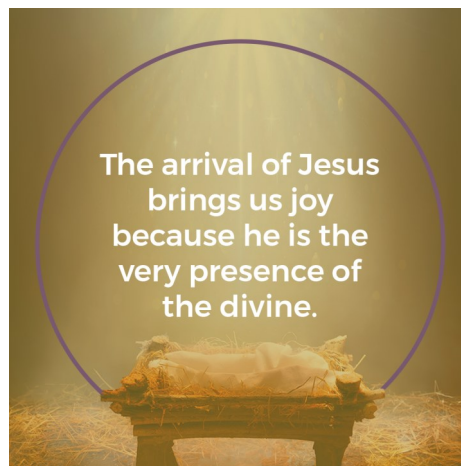
believe one aspect of the heart of Christmas is that Jesus came so that our joy would not have to fluctuate with our environment.

**Read John 1:14.** As John began his gospel letter, he offered a different perspective on the birth of Jesus. Rather than recounting his iteration with the shepherds, magi, and manger, he gave a big-picture explanation of what took place in Bethlehem.

John described the incarnation. Coming from the Latin word **carne**, which means

flesh, the incarnation was God putting skin on and becoming one of us. Verse 14 says the Word became flesh. (*Word is capitalized because it is the person of Jesus.*) He is called the Word because He perfectly embodies all of scripture in human flesh by how He lived here on earth. When Jesus was born in the manger, He was God coming to live among us—as one of us—with skin and bone, flesh and blood.

This passage gives us two reasons for a joy that does not have to change with the seasons or shift with our situations.



Joy can be a constant in our lives and a grounding attitude in the face of all the world has to offer.

### POINT #1 – WE CAN HAVE JOY BECAUSE GOD CAME TO US

A common misconception people carry around with them is that to be reunited with God in right relationship with Him, we must work super hard to be perfect, or strive to make our way to Him. One of the greatest joy robbers in our lives is thinking we can never be good enough. We are broken and flawed people who hurt others, we make mistakes, and we live selfish lives. If we are relying on our abilities to earn a connection with God, we will always be disappointed.

The same is true for our joy in God. Many times, life can look like a messy disaster from our perspective. It can be challenging for us to find a reason for joy in our circumstances; however, if we look closely, we might see God coming near to us like He did that first Christmas night to let us know He is making something of our lives when we are tempted to feel hopeless.

Joy is at the heart of Christmas because knowing that we could never make it to Him, God came to us. It is the only religion in the world where the deity does what is necessary to unite with humanity.

#### Discussion Question:

✚ Why does the joy we experience in life seem to be so circumstantial?

**Read Romans 5:8.** For Paul, there is no naughty list or a good one that we must work hard to escape or earn. The gift of God's grace is offered to us generously without price because we could never afford it on our own. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. This is why the characters in the Christmas story are so overjoyed—from the shepherds in the field to Simeon at the temple—because the long-awaited arrival of the Messiah meant God had finally come to rescue us.

The second reason joy can be a constant reality in our lives is that God loves us and is committed to our transformation through His power.

### POINT #2 – GOD LOVES US JUST AS WE ARE AND TOO MUCH TO LEAVE US THAT WAY

Do you realize that you are loved by God? Not just tolerated or put up with but loved! Deeply loved. In fact, John says this love that God has for us is like that of a father for his children. Jesus came from the Father full of grace and truth.

This is key to understanding our second reason for abiding joy. When Jesus came to us, He came full of grace. This grace that John writes about is the Greek word *charis*,

which means favor, kindness, or a gift of blessing. Like a wrapped gift shared from one to another can bring joy to our hearts, so this gift of Jesus is grace from God. We haven't earned it. We don't deserve it. But God offers it to us, and when we recognize it, it fills us with joy. God loves us just the way we are!

#### Discussion Questions:

- ✚ How is the incarnation unique to the Christian faith? How does it shape your ideas of sin and forgiveness?
- ✚ When was a time in life that you received grace? How did it make you feel?

**Read I John 4:9.** The author insists that Jesus came to us and manifested His love among us because He desires for us to find incredible joy in Him. This requires a gift of truth and grace. It is the most loving thing to do for another—to embrace with full acceptance and humble truth telling.

### POINT #3 – JOY IS A RESULT OF GRACE

Grace is a word that appears frequently in the church because it is the way we live with joy. Grace and truth lead to joy.

Our heavenly Father sent Jesus to a manger in Bethlehem because He wanted to dwell among us to demonstrate His amazing grace and life-changing truth. We can experience joy in our lives no matter the circumstances because we can be confident in knowing that God is with us, and God is for us.

The late pastor Charles Spurgeon said it this way: "There is a marvelous medicinal power in joy. Most medicines are distasteful; but this, which is the best of all medicines, is sweet to the taste, and comforting to the heart. This blessed joy is very contagious. One [unhappy] spirit brings a kind of plague into the house; one person who is wretched seems to stop all the birds from singing wherever he goes . . . [But] the grace of joy is contagious. Holy joy will oil the wheels of your life's machinery. Holy joy will strengthen you for your daily labor. Holy joy will beautify you and give you an influence over the lives of others."

#### Discussion Questions:

- ✚ How can your deep abiding joy impact the world around you?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, this Christmas, may we discover deep and abiding joy in Your love and the sacrifice of Jesus. Let this transformative power change our hearts and the world around us. Amen.