

Childlike Faith in the Light of Christmas

By Jim Davis

Why is it that joy and peace are so illusive? The Christmas season pronounces our personal longing for joy and peace. It normally brings great memories of the security of our childhood and the joy of the love expressed to us during those times. But during the adult years there is marked absence of the excitement and tranquility. For some, the absence of loved ones, personal debt, and other troubles turn the pleasure of our past memories into more fuel for our present despair.

Recent conflicts in Bethlehem are not much encouragement to our quest for the illusive joy and peace. Yet we are reminded that 2,000 years ago an angel announced good news of great joy for all the people because in the city of David there has been born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This announcement was followed by the appearance of a multitude of angels that praised God and said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased" (Luke 2:10-14). This expression of hope has stilled the souls and warmed the hearts of more people than can be numbered. There is a Savior who was born in Bethlehem and therefore there is hope. Christmas has always been about hope. Remove hope then joy and peace must go with it. God gave the ultimate gift of eternal life provided through His only begotten Son that we might have hope.

Maybe if we consider the benefits of childlike faith in the light of Christmas it will help some to determine that the gospel of Jesus Christ is our only hope. For those who have already put their trust in Christ these truths will be a reminder of why we can experience joy and peace in any circumstance. Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all" (Luke 18:17). Jesus did not want us to be childlike in our behavior or in our understanding but in our trust. Children are by nature dependent and trusting in those who have charge over them. Jesus is Savior but until we come in humility to depend upon Him there will be no abiding joy. Until we come to trust in Him there will be no peace on earth or in our personal lives. There is peace for those who are pleasing to God but without faith it is impossible to please Him.

Here are a few of the benefits of a childlike faith. If we embrace the reality of this Biblical principle of humility we will experience joy and peace. We may experience the excitement and wonder of Christmas much the way children do. Here are some of the characteristics that made Christmas in our childhood special. We will apply these characteristics to God's promise of a Savior.

Children enjoy the presence of family during Christmas. God's word says, "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). God has provided a way for us to know the security of His family. We are adopted into God's family and He is willing to take us into His home. He is able to take the ugliest sinner and transform him into a child of God. The Psalmist David said, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:10-12). There is peace on earth for

those who fear Him. God wants us to humble ourselves and come to Him for salvation. The security and warmth of coming home to God who created us, and desires to save us from our sin is the reason that we can say with the multitude of angels, "glory to God in the highest."

Children experience the warmth and security of home in a special way at Christmas. There is nothing like the comforts of home. There is no better way to define a home than to picture a family gathered around the living room fireplace on a cold winter evening during the Christmas season. Protection from the harsh winter, security from harm, and the smell of mother's good cooking represents the peace that home provides for a child. Jesus' open invitation in Matthew 11:28 is, "come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. One of our great comforts is that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us and will return again to take us to be with Him. We have the promise of an eternal home with God. The home is a place of rest and peace and anything that we have ever enjoyed in this life will not compare to what our future holds when we go home to be with God.

Children trust in their parent's provision at Christmas. Jesus said, "what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:9-11). God is able to provide for His children. He will keep us safe and he will provide for our needs.

Children enjoy the support of family and friends at Christmas. The Apostle John said, "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Fellowship means that we partake or share together. The unconditional love of family and friends and their acceptance despite our flaws is one of the necessary ingredients for our physical, spiritual, and emotional growth. Fellowship should characterize our church family in this life as it most certainly will in the life to come.

Children enjoy their innocence from guilt at Christmas. Perhaps one of the biggest reasons we cannot experience the illusive joy and peace is because we are guilty. We may remember when we were a child with a clean slate. Life was very uncomplicated then and we did not suffer remorse for the many bad things that we have done. There is a decision about what we will do with our guilt. We can pretend it does not exist; We can face it and try to fix it ourselves; Or we can humble ourselves and trust in the Savior to deliver us and cleanse us from our guilt. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Jesus has paid the penalty for our sins. "He made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus Christ alone is able to cleanse us from the guilt of sin.

Children enjoy the excitement of gifts at Christmas. If we truly believe the promise of God's word we could not help but experience the joy that God intends for us. He has lavished us in His grace. "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything per-

taining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by his own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:3-4). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

Children enjoy the hope of a bright future at Christmas. A child has an enthusiasm for life. An eagerness to learn and a daily excitement for what the future will bring. That is exactly the way we who have trusted Christ should be. "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Conclusion

There was good reason for the excitement over the angels' announcement of a Savior on that first Christmas. I realize that there may be many readers who have never experienced the joy and peace of a secure home. For others that experience is now a faded memory. The good news of great joy and peace is freely offered to all who will receive the kingdom of God with the humility of a child.