

3 Choices You Can Make to Claim God's Promise of Joy This Christmas

"Listen! Do not fear. For I bring you good news of great joy, which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10b).

Good news that causes great joy ... what a promise! Yet I have many friends this Christmas who are walking a journey of heartbreak—infertility, cancer, the death of a parent, loss of a relationship or loss of a job. Several have wondered, *Where's the joy?*

I get it. Life feels so dark and difficult at times. Joy almost seems superficial.

As you study the birth of Jesus, you have to wonder what Mary felt. When the angel first announced to her that she would give birth to the Messiah, she must have had dreams about giving birth to such an exceptional child. She might have spent time imagining the birth and who would be there to help.

My guess is she didn't imagine giving birth in a barn. Was she ready for a visit from some dirty, smelly, loud shepherds soon after the delivery? I'm guessing not! After delivering their first child, most women need some time to rest and recuperate before family and friends come for a visit—let alone strangers! If I had been Mary, I might have said, "It's great that you saw angels, but I'm exhausted! I need a good nap, and then a cup of coffee, and *then* you can tell me all about what you witnessed in the night sky!"

The truth is that life doesn't usually go according to plan. Grieving is a part of our journey. Unexpected circumstances will leave us disappointed and heartbroken at times. So how is God's promise of joy relevant? How do we experience joy even

in the midst of the painful moments of life?

3 Choices You Can Make to Experience Joy This Christmas

Reset your expectations. Face first Christmas certainly wasn't perfect, and yours won't be either. I'm convinced our expectations often get us in trouble. We love to dream and imagine how the holidays will progress, but then when things don't go according to plan, we're disappointed. Dreaming isn't bad; I'm all for it. But in your dreams, face reality. Lay down your expectations. Grieving is meant to be a part of our worship. So when your expectations aren't met or tragedy strikes, don't run from grief. Lean into it. But cling to Jesus! Remember He said, "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4). Practice going before the Lord each morning and praying, "Lord, I lay down my expectations before you. I give every single dream to you. I thank you that you are enough. Help me to remember, even when life feels hard, that you love me deeply. I ask you for the ability to celebrate life's little moments. And in those moments, may I be filled with joy."

Refocus your mind on God's promise to provide. Worry often robs our joy. Instead of worrying about the future, rehearse God's promises to provide. I'm pretty sure as Mary and Joseph tried to find a place stay in overbooked Bethlehem, they both felt worried. What would happen if Mary had to give birth on the street? Surely that couldn't be God's plan for the Messiah!

Sometimes in life, we won't be able to see the way forward. All the doors might seem to be shut. In those moments when you're tempted to worry, spinning "what if's" in your head, stop. Refocus on your mind on God's promise to provide. Remind yourself, "All that I need, God will provide." His Word says so (Phil. 4:19).

Renew your dependency on Christ. Joy isn't some glib, happy feeling when circumstances are perfect. Joy is rooted in our

relationship with a loving God and in the security that we can trust Him. Jesus entered our dark world of violence, pain and illness. As you face dark moments this Christmas, renew your dependency on Christ. Declare out loud, “Lord Jesus, I trust you! I am utterly and totally dependent on you!”

I wonder if after the shepherds left, and the barn grew quiet, Mary enjoyed a few sweet moments nursing baby Jesus and hearing God the Father say, “Well done, my faithful child. I’m pleased with you.” Joy comes in those tiny, treasured moments when you feel the whisper of heaven, and you know God is near.
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