

At the Movies: Christmas Edition
Week 3: The Joy of Christmas
Luke 1:46-49

Twenty years ago, a cinematic masterpiece was released in theaters and quickly found its way into hearts. I don't think it's too much to say that it is one of the greatest Christmas movies of all time, if not the outright best. Of course, I'm talking about [Elf \(show movie poster\)](#).

And, to get us into the Christmas spirit, I thought I'd have some fun today...(jacket and Crocs)

Another way to get into the Christmas spirit is to take a tour of the lights across town. Once again, our Video Director, Tim Bedwell, created a map as a gift for us [\(show QR code\)](#).

Now, if you've never seen Elf, or it's been a while, it's about a human named Buddy who was raised by elves in the North Pole. He slipped into Santa's bag as a baby and Papa Elf graciously took him in and raised him as his own. But, as Buddy grew up, he realized he was special. And after overhearing a conversation, he learned that he wasn't a real elf. Santa broke the news that his father was a man named Walter Hobbs who lived in New York City...and was on the naughty list.

So Buddy goes on an adventure to New York City, hoping to reconnect with his dad and bring back the joy of Christmas to his life. And, of course, he would do it by practicing the [Code of the Elves](#). 1) Treat every day like Christmas, 2) There's room for everyone on the nice list, 3) The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.

After growing up in the North Pole, the magic of New York is almost too much for him to bear. He can hardly contain himself. Check out this clip...[\(Elf NYC clip\)](#)

Throughout the movie, Buddy's joy is contrasted to everyone else's stress. There's Walter who needs to publish a best-selling children's book to save his career. Jovie, who's just trying to make it through the holidays. His half-brother, Michael, who's tired of his dad being such a workaholic. Emily is stressed about keeping her family together and making room for Buddy. The mailroom guy trying to figure out his purpose in life and for someone to listen to all of his good ideas.

Buddy brings a new sense of joy and wonder into each of their lives. So, when Buddy starts feeling the stresses of life for the first time...stress over the relationship with his dad that wasn't what he expected, stress that there was no Christmas spirit anymore...when Buddy starts feeling stressed, all the people he helped find joy came together to help Buddy find his joy again, too.

When he left the utopia of the North Pole and stepped into the real world, Buddy found what a lot of us have discovered in life [...it's hard to be joyful when our life is filled with stress.](#)

But, here's what I want us to know this morning. While it's hard to find joy in the midst of our stressed out lives, it's not impossible. And I think the Christmas story shows us this. If you have a Bible, or Bible app, turn to Luke 1:46.

The songs we sing this time of year that remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus often talk about it being a silent night, peaceful, merry and bright. But it was a pretty stressful time in Jewish culture. They were under Roman rule, governed by an evil, oppressive man named Herod. They were being taxed to the point of financial ruin. Their religious laws were suffocating.

And then you have Mary, the mother of Jesus. God approaches her through an angel who says, "Mary, if you're up for it, you're going to give birth to the Savior of the world." In faith and surrender, Mary agrees. But, even walking by faith can lead to some hard times. Mary becomes an unwed, pregnant teenager. She has to explain it to her fiancé, Joseph. To her parents. I'm sure she caught the judgmental stares of her neighbors. It all had to be incredibly stressful on this young woman.

But even though she knew the stress and hardship that lay ahead, this is what Mary says...(READ Luke 1:46-49)

This passage begins what is known as the Magnificat. Literally, "shouting out the greatness of God!" Mary shouts out the greatness of God's salvation. The greatness of his faithfulness and mercy and love. She says that He has been mindful of her humble state. That doesn't just mean that God saw Mary's humility, though he did. "Humble state" is a reference to Mary's low social position. She was a nobody from nowhere. She faced hardships and difficulties in life. She didn't come from the best and the brightest. Her people were despised and looked down upon, even by other Jews.

But don't miss this...despite her circumstances and all the hardships that were ahead for Mary, look at what she says..."My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Despite her circumstances, Mary had a deep seated joy in her heart. And it's because her joy wasn't based on her circumstances, but the Lord. Did you see that. She said, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Mary's response to her circumstances teaches us something that I think is so important when it comes to living a joy-filled life. Something that I want to experience more of in my own life, and it's this: Life doesn't have to be perfect to be joyful.

Even if you don't feel happy, you can still be joyful. We use joy and happiness like they're synonymous, but they're not. They're two very different words because they have to very different starting places.

Happiness is external. Happiness hinges on what happens in your life. If things are merry and bright, you feel happy. You're happy because you got that gift you were really hoping for. You're

happy because so and so is coming home for Christmas. You're happy because things are working out in your life right now. And listen, there's nothing wrong with being happy! We just have to know that happiness is incredibly volatile! It's fleeting. We can have it one minute and then it's gone the next. Happiness is temporary because it depends on what happens in our lives. It's external. Comes from outside of us.

Joy, on the other hand, is internal and, I believe, can transcend the external circumstances in your life. In other words, even when what is happening outside of you is not what you'd want, you can still find joy on the inside because joy transcends the external circumstances of your life.

As a pastor, I've walked alongside of people who are going through some of the hardest things you can imagine in life. People with cancer eating away at their body and they know they have just weeks to live. People who lost a child or spouse. Were betrayed by someone they loved. And there have been so many times when I've walked out of hospital rooms or homes and sat in my car and wept over the pain that people feel.

And what always amazes me is when I'm sitting with someone in the midst of their pain and they look up at me with a tear in their eye, but a smile on their face. The tear represents the pain they feel, but the smile comes from the joy of the Lord that resides deep within them. Joy that cannot be taken away by their circumstances.

How is that possible? It's because happiness is dependent on the flesh, but joy is from the Spirit of God living and bearing fruit in us. Joy is a gift from the Holy Spirit of God. It's not something we can manufacture on our own. The Apostle Paul says in [Galatians 5:22-23...\(READ\)](#)

These qualities are not a list of things we need to grow in, but a list of things that **grow in us** through the Spirit of God. When we walk in the Spirit and pursue more of God in our lives, these qualities grow in us and bear fruit. And so joy is not something we work for, it's something we're given. If you want to experience joy in the midst of challenging and stressful circumstances, you must allow the Holy Spirit to be in control of your life.

If you want to move from just experiencing happiness, which fluctuates up and down based on what happens to you...if you want to move from that to living a more joy-filled life, you have to move from being controlled by your own flesh and desires to being controlled by the Spirit of God. Allowing the Spirit to live and move inside of you. If you want to experience the joy of the Lord in your life, you have to die to yourself and follow Him. And out of that surrender and trust, you will experience a joy that cannot be taken away.

The circumstances in Mary's life were far from perfect. She was in a stressful situation, living in a stressed out world. But Mary is so tuned in with God that she's able to find joy, even in the midst of her stress. And, I love what she says in verse 49 [...\(READ Lk. 1:49\)](#)

Your life doesn't have to be perfect to be joyful. As you continue to walk closer and closer with God, being led by the Holy Spirit in your life...even when things aren't what you want them to be, even when life catches you by surprise or knocks you off your feet, even when your circumstances are difficult and stressful, you can say with Mary, "Holy is his name."

Really, here's what it all comes down to...Joy comes from knowing Jesus. That's it. Joy comes from knowing Jesus. So, when it comes to joy, it's all about who you know. Let's check out one more clip from Elf...("I know him!" clip)

The workers in the "North Pole" weren't experiencing much happiness or joy. They were stressed out by the season, and shoppers, and all the work they had to do. It was wearing them out. They didn't have time or space for joy. To them, Santa coming wasn't a big deal. He was another hired hand, just like them. But Buddy knew him, and it filled him with joy...at least until he discovered it wasn't the real Santa. Instead, it was a fake that smelled like beef and cheese and sat on a throne of lies.

The point is! If you're looking for more joy in your life, it all comes down to who you know. Joy comes from knowing Jesus. No matter what your circumstances or how stressed out you are, getting to know Jesus more through his Word, getting to know Jesus more by living and loving others the way he did...getting to know Jesus more will bring more joy into your life.

If you're surrounded by people at work who are stressed. If you have a workaholic boss that's pushing everyone to meet their end of year goals. A co-worker that makes everything about them and everyone else miserable. You can walk with joy. And if people ask you why you're so joyful, you can say, "I know him!"

This week, we're going to bump into even more people who are living to the max...maxed out time, maxed out schedules, maxed out credit cards. They're just trying to make it through the holidays and hope that everything levels off in the new year and that they're able to pay their bills. When they ask you why you're so joyful, you can say, "I know him!"

When you're with family and it gets a little cray-cray! You can have joy because you know him.

When you've been hurt by someone. Betrayed. Maybe you're dreading this week because you know you're going to have to see them again. You can walk into it with joy because you know him.

If the stress of the holidays or work or family was too much and you feel back into some old patterns and habits you thought you had overcome...you can find joy even in the midst of that because you know him.

And here's the beautiful part about this. Not only can you know him, but He knows you...and he loves you more than you can imagine. God loves you so much that he was willing to send his Son to show you the fulness of his love. Jesus was born to make a way for us to be forgiven and

reconciled back to God. He knew us. He knew our sin. He knew our pain and the stress we feel. He came to carry the weight of that all the way to the cross so that in Him we can experience love and joy and peace in our lives.

And because Jesus went to the cross and paid the price for our sin, making a way for us to be reunited with the love of our Heavenly Father, the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 10:13, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Everyone. Even you. You can walk out of here today saying, "I know him, and he knows and loves me." And that truth can bring you joy no matter what circumstances you're walking through today.

Do you know him?