

**Sermon Description:** Christmas break. Winter break. School break. End-of-year break. We love the idea that slowing down is a part of the Christmas season. The white elephant gift, or the unexpected surprise, is we often get busier during this time. We don't even just get a little bit busier. This month can become absolute chaos. So how do we find joy amidst the chaos of the Christmas season? And, more importantly, how do we find joy in Jesus amidst such overwhelming chaos?

**Main Passage:** Luke 2:1-15

**Title:** Good news of great joy

**Topics:** Holidays> Christmas

**Tags:** joy, Christmas, rest

**Questions to consider:**

- How are you most likely to respond to the chaos of this season? Try to control it? Succumb to it? Abandon it?
- Jesus' arrival amidst chaos is announced as "good news of great joy." Do you believe that receiving that message as true is the most important part of Christmas for you?
- Will you commit to seeing and receiving every other joy of Christmas – even amidst the chaos – as a tangible reminder of the joy and salvation that is found only in Jesus?

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The joy of a kids Christmas program!

Introduction: Treating Christmas like a mathematical equation. We think, "If I can just input the correct variables to the equation, then I'll have the best Christmas ever!"

$$3x_1 + 4x_2 + x_3 + \frac{14}{3}x_4 + 3ex_5 + \sqrt[3]{x_6} + \dots$$

Potential temptations or responses to the Christmas equation:

- Control it. "I can do this."
- Succumb to it. "Whatever is fine with me."
- Abandon it. "Wake me in January."

Series title: A White Elephant Christmas

Sermon title: Good news of great joy

Today's theme: We love the idea that slowing down is a part of the Christmas season. The white elephant gift, or the unexpected surprise, is we often get busier during this time. So how do we find joy, especially joy in Jesus, amidst the chaos of the Christmas season?

**Luke 2:1–15**

<sup>1</sup>In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup>(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to their own town to register. <sup>4</sup>So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup>He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <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, because there was no guest room available for them. <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 the glory of the Lord shone around 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>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” <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.”

There are a few interesting notes as we traverse this passage. What our staff noticed this past week as we studied together were some of the following:

1. A census of the Roman world would have meant traveling chaos. People were traveling every which direction.
2. Joseph and Mary would have to make their own trip, to Bethlehem. We observed that this was a 70-mile journey. No airplanes. No cars.
3. They were *pledged* to be married but not married. And pregnant. Was this ever an issue on the journey?
4. Mary is quite pregnant. She’ll give birth on the other end of this trip. Would you want to make a 70-mile trip on foot (or donkey) in the last trimester of pregnancy?
5. And then there was the birth scene, both in its setting (stable with noisy animals!) and delivery of the child (pain, tears, screams).
6. Turning to the shepherds, can you imagine the chaos and concern (“and they were terrified”) of the glory of the Lord showing up amidst the darkness and quietness of the night? Is it not likely that they screamed for their lives?!
7. Verse 10-12 capture the essence of the Christmas message!
8. Though the story seems like it could have ended, “a great company of the heavenly host appeared.” More light. More glory. More terror and screaming??

A summary of our study revealed much more chaos and noise that the song Silent Night might indicate. ☺

Now, let’s consider the passage in light of the three common temptations: control it, succumb to it, abandon it.

Control it.

- In the passage, it's very clear that nearly every part of this is outside the control of Mary and Joseph and the shepherds. The passage makes clear that the Romans had some control. But, beyond them, God is in control.
- Similarly, how much control can we have in our world, over this holiday? There's a certain folly in exaggerating how much control we can have in life and this season. Yet that might be a real temptation for many of us.
- Is it for you? Do you approach this season with the belief that if you tweak enough variables (e.g. buy the right presents, take certain days off work, avoid certain conversation topics, etc.) that you'll have the "best Christmas ever"?

Succumb to it. (I struggle with this one)

- Given the story, can you imagine the conversations the shepherds would have had? "That was CRAZY. You saw it, right? We all saw it. But, seriously, did that just really happen!!? We have to go see if what they said happened truly happened." I can see a person, kind of like me, skeptical yet willing (succumbing) to the desires of the group.
- Similarly, this season comes with SO MANY expectations about what the holiday should be. If you are a parent or grandparent, you might feel you have to succumb to all those expectations for the sake of your kids or grandkids. If you're in your teens, twenties, or thirties, you might feel the need to succumb to the expectation of parents to come home for the holidays. If you're one of the younger siblings (like me!) you may have developed the muscle of being flexible so you just go with the flow, even at Christmas.
- Is that you? Do you float through this season like you're in a lazy river (or maybe more like being carried along by a tsunami!)? Many times I've found myself kind of "waking up" at a service in December or even Christmas Eve realizing I've succumbed to the season rather than truly experiencing it.

Abandon it.

- Consider again the passage. Where's the exit to this divine plan of God where I, Joseph, am not pledged to be married to a woman who is not pregnant, conceived of by the Holy Spirit? Couldn't there have been a shepherd who was quick to volunteer to stay with the flock and send his buddies on without him?
- Similarly, there's a real temptation which may exist in your heart to abandon the season. Malls? Nope, online shopping. Time off? Nope, work harder with end-of-year deadlines approaching. Go home for the holidays? Nope, make excuses as to why you need to stick close to home.
- Is that you? Do you think January can't get here soon enough? Do hope against hope for it all to be over?

I want to remind you of the heart of this passage: <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.**

Did God send rest? Did God send a productivity app? What did God send? He sent a Savior. He sent Jesus. GOOD news of GREAT joy. Good NEWS of great joy. Good news of great JOY. It's

for all people! Good and great news to be heard, received, and believed that will bring the truest joy. Jesus. The heart of Christmas. No equation needed. Jesus!!

This led me to consider other examples of Jesus amidst chaos

### **Luke 4:16-21, 28-30**

<sup>16</sup>He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: <sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” <sup>20</sup>Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup>He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”...<sup>28</sup>All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. <sup>29</sup>They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. <sup>30</sup>But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

### **Luke 23:32–37**

<sup>32</sup>Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup>When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup>Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. <sup>35</sup>The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” <sup>36</sup>The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar <sup>37</sup>and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

**Jesus’ arrival amidst chaos is announced as “good news of great joy.” Do you believe that receiving this good news of great joy – a Savior, which is Christ the Lord – is the most important part of Christmas for you?**

Is Christmas about an equation, where if we just get the right terms with the correct variables it’ll add up to the perfect Christmas? NO!!!  $3x_1 + 4x_2 + x_3 + \frac{14}{3}x_4 + 3ex_5 + \sqrt[3]{x_6} + \dots$

**But, what do we do with all the things??**

- Christmas lights
- Hygge
- Exhaustion
- The list
- Financial stress
- Table

Will you commit to seeing and receiving every other joy of Christmas – even amidst the chaos – as a tangible reminder of the joy and salvation that is found only in Jesus?



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Control it. Succumb to it. Abandon it.



A  
*White Elephant*  
Christmas

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How do we find joy amidst the chaos  
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And, more importantly,  
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If all good gifts come from God,  
then the joy we receive from every good  
gift come from God.

If that's true, every joy and every gift  
can point us to the Giver and the  
greatest gift, Jesus.

**Christmas lights**

**The list**

**Hygge**

**Financial stress**

**Exhaustion**

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