

Rejoice with Exceeding Great Joy

Annie

Scriptures:

Luke 1:39-55

Luke 2:8-14

John 15 and 16



Mary lay on her bed gazing through a gap in the shutters where she could just glimpse the starlit night sky, such wonderful evidence of the immensity of God's amazing creation. It still felt almost like a dream, yet she knew it was very real, she already felt the changes in her body and her heart sang with joyful anticipation. "Do not be afraid" were the words the Angel had spoken, and, as she lay in her bed in the darkness, young Mary felt the strength and presence of the One who had chosen her. The words of one of her favourite psalms came to her mind, "in peace I will both lie down and sleep for it is God alone who makes me dwell in safety" and a peace that what had been spoken to her was indeed God's will, flooded her being. God had chosen her; out of all the women in the world, He had chosen her to be the mother of His Son. The One who had spoken the world into being was now growing as a human baby in her womb. The One who had formed her in her mother's womb, was now developing in hers.

The joy that Mary felt was inexplicable. She had to tell her betrothed, Joseph, that she was bearing the Christ child, she had to tell her parents that she was pregnant, both fearful prospects. But, God, the mighty, all powerful God, had done this and He would strengthen and protect her. And, when she had told Joseph and her parents, she knew what she must do, she would go and visit her cousin, surely Elizabeth would understand and believe this incredible miracle, for she was experiencing her very own miracle, a much longed for child in her old age.

Mary's meeting with Elizabeth was filled with joy, wonder and reverent thankfulness. That Elizabeth's child should leap for joy is amazing, knowing from his mother's womb that this young woman was the chosen one who was carrying the long awaited Messiah in her womb, is utterly miraculous. Joy and rejoicing abounded, this was real, and Mary's heart overflowed in words of adoration. It was awe inspiring that the One who was her Maker, who had knit her together, was her son, growing daily within her own womb.

When that great day came and the Christ child was born, the first words of the Angel to those lowly shepherds on the hillside outside of Bethlehem were, once again, "Do not be afraid". And then he told them why "Behold I bring you tidings of GREAT JOY." The announcement of the birth of the Hope of all nations fills the Angelic host with such boundless joy, heaven could not contain it. Their exuberant, joyful worship overflowed into the still night air, causing the shepherds to leave their watch, abandon their lambs on the hillside to go

and see the One who was the Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrificial Lamb, born to save humankind.

For hundreds of years the nation of Israel had been expecting their Messiah, waiting for the prophecies of this great Saviour to be fulfilled, waiting and hoping for the freedom that He would bring. I wonder, just maybe, if their waiting had become wearisome, if their anticipation had lost its spark, if their hope had lost its joy? Had all the daily struggles and troubles, the oppression of their overlords, the hypocrisy of their religious leaders, robbed them of that wonder and joy that the coming of Yeshua was meant to bring them? Does this sound at all familiar?

Today, as we are making our annual Advent journey, looking forward to the earthly birth of our Lord and Saviour, we are also reminded that we, too, are living in a time of hope and anticipation for the return of the victorious, all conquering Jesus Christ to this Earth. Are you living in joyful hope? Or are you allowing the daily grind of 21st century living to rob you of the joy that our wonderful God longs for us to feel when we think of that glorious day?

Jesus knew what we would face, how we would often feel weighed down by the burdens and anxieties of our life. And He made a point of reassuring us with a promise that He has left us the gift that no-one and nothing can take from us. He has given us His Joy, a Joy that fills us to overflowing and yet never runs out. The Joy of the Lord is our strength, a strength that keeps our hope alive, a hope that fills us with joy in a never ending circle.

Prayer: Abba Father, in this time of information overload and instant gratification, may we keep hold of Your Hand, living in the joyful hope that all of the promises in Your Word are coming to pass, in Your time. We thank you for Your Joy that never leaves us and for the Hope of all nations who is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, through the power of Holy Spirit we pray Amen.