

Away In A Manger

Week 4: Joy

I know it's hard to imagine, but back in the day, when a woman was pregnant, you didn't have any idea whether the baby was going to be a boy or a girl.

Here are some of the things people used to try to predict the baby's gender

1. **If it's a girl**, you will have more **morning sickness**. With a boy, it should be smooth sailing.
2. If it's a **girl**, you will have **skin issues, like acne**, because the girl is trying to steal your beauty. If it's a boy, your skin will be smooth and silky. I think the science sounds solid here.
3. If it's a **boy**, you will crave **salty things**, like chips and pickles. If it's a **girl**, you will crave **sweet things**. I get it girls are sweet and boys are salty.
4. If your heart rate is **under 140**, then it's a **boy**. Over 140 and it's a girl.
5. If you **carry low**, it's a **girl**; if you carry high, it's a boy.

Remember folks; never let science or facts get in the way of a good story or conspiracy theory.

With ultrasounds came the era of the gender reveal. Take a look at these. **video...What is the consistent**

emotion displayed at the end. It is joy! It is expressed in different ways, but it is unmistakably joy. Well, **except for that little girl.** I guess in her mind, there can only be one princess in the house.

And then there's the greatest gender reveal ever. Yes, it's in the Bible.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "**do not be afraid** to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to **name him Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: ²³ "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. **Matthew 1:20-24**

This is better than a gender reveal party. This is a lot more than **pink smoke** or blue cake. This was supernatural. **Look at what God revealed to Joseph.**

- 1. It's ok, she is still a virgin,** as unbelievable as that may seem because the **Holy Spirit is the father.**
- 2. The baby will be a boy.**
- 3: He will save his people from their sins.**
- 4. This is a fulfillment of what the prophets said.**

5: He will be **"Immanuel"** God with us.

Some of that sounded familiar to Joseph. It is reasonable to believe that after hearing this, Joseph's mind went right to Isaiah. **All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us'). Isaiah 7:14** This was in the works 700 years earlier when Isaiah made this prophecy.

What would have gone through Joseph's mind?

What goes through the mind of any dad when he finds he is going to have a son?

- Will he look like me?
- Will he sound like me when he talks or laughs?
- Will he enjoy sports and fishing like me?
- **I can hardly wait** to meet him and hold him...oh my goodness...**am I ready** for all this? Ready or not...here he comes.

Perhaps Joseph had some of these same thoughts after the gender reveal dream, up through the moments when he and Mary made their **90 mile trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem** to be counted for the census that had been decreed. **There was a lot to think about during those days leading to Jesus' birth.**

Without a doubt, once he settled down and realized that he was in the presence of one of God's angel warriors and survived he would have felt relief that turned to joy.

Joy explodes when the shepherds came to confirm all that he had heard from God about their little boy.)
They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them. Luke 2:16-20

But what about Joseph, what might he have been pondering?

What did the angels say this news of Messiah would produce in people? ...but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. Luke 2:10

That word that is used here translated "joy" means "calm delight, gladness."

It's because of this good news. This news is to bring calm delight and gladness. This is the news that settles you down by getting your attention and then you lean back smile and laugh.

I remember the day when this happened. "What, we are going to have another baby number four? (Ahh) Another baby? Yes, that sounds great. Laughter...And he still makes us laugh.

Aside from joy, what would have been on his mind? One thing that would have been on Josephs' mind was what would happen in just **eight short, sleep deprived days.** **Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived. Luke 2:21**

From the moment Joseph found out he was going to be a dad to a son, thoughts of eight days after the birth probably started forming in his mind. Almost all Jewish men in Joseph's day would know the significance and the great joy that comes with seeing one's son, especially one's firstborn who is a son, officially being included in the covenant relationship with God. The joy of Joseph would have been overwhelming as he "treasured and pondered" the ancient Jewish tradition known as b'rit milah, that he soon would have the honor and privilege of leading his new little family through together.

What joy he would have felt pondering this event.

This ancient and sacred custom of circumcision traces back thousands of years to the time of Abraham and the covenant he entered into with God concerning a promise of becoming the father of many great

nations. It would be the **identifying way** that Abraham and his offspring would be **set apart** (made holy) for God.

Then God said to Abraham, "Your responsibility is to obey the terms of the covenant. You and all your descendants have **this continual responsibility.** ¹⁰ This is the covenant that you and your descendants must keep: Each male among you must be circumcised. ¹¹ You must cut off the flesh of your foreskin as a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² From generation to generation, every male child must be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. This applies not only to members of your family but also to the servants born in your household and the foreign-born servants whom you have purchased. ¹³ All must be circumcised. Your bodies will **bear the mark of my everlasting covenant.** Genesis 17:9-13

This is about hearing of the physical sign of God's everlasting covenant.

The significance of this covenant happening on the **eighth day of a new life is symbolic of the life cycle of creation.** God worked six days towards the completion of His creation. On the seventh day, God rested. **On the eighth day, a new cycle of a new week of a new life set apart for the enjoyment and glory of God started.** Every Jewish son since Abraham came to know of the significance of what happened eight days after their birth. **While they obviously were too young to remember the moment, their fathers and families certainly never forgot the significance when each Jewish son was welcomed into the covenant God had ordained with all of Israel throughout the generations.**

For a father, this tradition would bring much pride and joy. For Joseph, it would be no different. Well, maybe a little different since he knew that his son was not only his first born, but God's first born sent as Messiah and savior. Yes, he would have been overflowing with joy.

Remember joy follows good news. Any father would understand...

The joy of passing on something good (to your child).

It's passed on from generation to generation. Lots of things change. They wandered in the desert. They conquered the Promised Land. They had kings, good ones and bad ones. Armies from Assyria, Babylon, and finally Rome conquered them. They were even taken into captivity. Lots changed, but one thing didn't. The men of Israel passed this sign of God's eternal covenant to their sons.

My Dad passed on many good things to me.

- **Simple things, like my first Cincinnati Reds game at Crosley field, watching Pete Rose and this new hotshot catcher named Johnny Bench.**
- **My first game at "The HorseShoe" watching Woody Hayes prowl the sidelines.**
- **Some deeper things...Love for Jesus.**

- A belief in His church, no matter how flawed the people in it are...you don't bounce around.
- Persistence, it's not about being flashy. It's about grinding.

I'm sure passing these things along gave my dad joy.

As a dad, passing on good things to my kids has given me joy.

As Joseph anticipated sharing b'rit milah with his son, joy came because this announced good news. God had made a covenant with that as eternal. Something that started with Abraham and will last forever; you are a part of this.

In Exodus, this covenant is restated.

I will claim you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt. Exodus 6:7

We all pack a suitcase for our kids. Some of it is good and some of it is not. That's reality. We hope more is good than bad.

My desire is to pass on not just good things, but the best thing. God has made an everlasting covenant with anyone who will give himself or herself to Jesus, who is the very center of it.

Joseph had great joy in passing on to Jesus the covenant. Jesus was going to need to remember that he was

sent to fulfill this covenant. He will be tested. It will get hard. The **confidence** that he is a part of this good thing God is doing will be crucial.

If that isn't enough reason for Joseph to have joy, Joseph experiences... The joy of being surpassed.

This celebration for Jesus would be different, because when Joseph was brought by his father it was an older more mature member of the covenant community passing on the good news of belonging to his son who would continue doing what dad did.

For Joseph, he is holding one for whom he should bow and worship. And yet, it is his job to raise him. This son loved and chose his father before he was his father.

As a baby, Jesus had already surpassed his father in every possible means of measuring.

Every father wants his children to surpass him. I want my kids to far exceed me in their faithfulness, usefulness for the kingdom, and walk with God.

Joseph was the ultimate hero maker. He knew the joy of helping someone increase as he remains in the **background smiling and cheering.** A hero needs to do it all and get the credit. **A hero maker wants his or her fruit to grow on someone else's tree. Be the ladder for someone. What joy that brings.**

Joseph could only do for Jesus in **helping get started.**
Set him up for later, when Joseph could not help him.
But for now, he can.

Back to the beginning... ²⁴ **When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.**
Matthew 1:24-25

It is likely that Joseph was the one holding his baby boy on this important day. Jesus means "God saves." He held him and faithfully named him Jesus. This was Joseph's part to play. His name was a reminder that he was the one through whom God was going to do something for others that they couldn't do for themselves. This is the name the angel told him to give to Jesus, and he did. This brought him joy.

The joy of seeing eternity affected.

As a dad, it's easy to think practically. How is your child going to **make a living?** How will he **survive** in the world? What about his **education and preparation** for career? How will he **earn money?** What kind of **jobs will there be in the future?** What **classes should the child take freshman** year so that by senior year the child is in honors classes, because that's what will be needed for a career that pays well.

There is joy in knowing your kids are settled into life. That joy goes up when we see that what they are doing **blessing others.** It's having a **positive impact** on

people and their world. Remember joy is calm that is followed by gladness. Doesn't that fit your feeling dads, when your kids are getting set up in life?

Joseph was going to do his job and teach Jesus how to work with wood. He worked in the workshop with his son to teach him to be a carpenter. I bet that first smooth edge that Jesus made or perfectly square edge made him smile. "Ok, he's getting the hang of this. He'll someday be good enough to make a living at it." And then came his first completed project, maybe a chair. He's really close. Then a job comes at a neighbor's house for a kitchen table and to put in some cabinets. Joseph says, "Jesus, this is your job. I'll just come along and you take the lead and I'll follow.

What a day that would have been, seeing his son prepared to make his way and even help others.

Can you imagine the joy that Joseph had knowing that his son would be the one who would give eternal life to people? He would pave the way to living forever in God's presence. He would grow up to announce that The Kingdom of God is near. The restoration of God's rule over all things starts now in me. People could experience that kingdom now in glimpses, but would be in full affect in heaven when God's loving rule would be completely restored.

His son was going to have an effect on people that would have no end. Sure, he would turn pieces of wood into things that are useful and helpful for people in their lives right here. But he would build something

that has eternal consequence. He would build a bridge between his heavenly Father and sinful people, like me.

Jesus was a carpenter who was born to affect eternity as Messiah. You are a (fill in the blank) who was born to have an eternal affect by becoming a disciple who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus and committed to his mission, who helps other people learn to follow Jesus, be changed by Jesus and commit to his mission.

As Joseph looked into the face of Jesus, the first time his son would bleed and cry out in pain, He would be looking into the eyes of his earthly father as Jesus was being welcomed into the covenant of God's people. The final time Jesus would bleed would be 33 years later. Upon a Roman cross, Jesus would cry out for the last time while looking up toward the eyes of His Heavenly Father as He made a way for all people to enter into a covenant with God throughout eternity.

This story of joy is not a snow globe. You know that perfect setting where there is a manger, with animals perfectly placed and snow lightly falling. This story leads to the cross. There will be pain involved in Joseph's joy. He will see his son suffer and die. I say that to say this. If we talk about joy and ignore pain and suffering, then some us may leave here today worse off then we came. When everyone seems really happy, this is the worst most painful time because you have experienced loss. Someone isn't coming home. That could be a death. A divorce. That could be the loss of a

friendship, job. That could be a child that is in trouble. **I truly believe that this joy can coexist with your pain.** I hope you won't feel as if you need to fake it.

We can have joy like Joseph...

Joy that we are a part of something ancient that started in the beginning and will last. Joy that we get to pass along to the next generation whether ours or the ones we are discipling, helping learn to follow, be changed by, and commit Jesus mission. But you can't pass on what you don't have.

Joy, that through Jesus, God did what we could not do for ourselves. He dealt with our sin issue and its fallout death. Joy, that because of Jesus, we can have eternal life and we can have an eternal impact in others.

This Christmas, are you looking for diversion, numbing, a jolt of energy, happiness, or are you really looking for joy. My prayer is that you will seek joy by seeking Jesus.