

# “Bringing Joy to The World”

Sermon by James Brassard  
from Text of Luke 1:39-46  
given at Christian Community Presbyterian Church on  
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<http://ccpc.bowiemd.org/sermons.htm>

One of the things Andrea and I like to do when traveling around the United States is to visit presidential libraries and museums. A couple of summers ago we visited Calvin Coolidge's hometown in North Hampton Mass. Cool Cal, known for his reticence, lived in a small town . . . a few homes, a post office and grange hall and church. We went to church, asked what the sermon was about. It was sin. Well, what did the preacher say about it? He's against it.

Outside of town is the cemetery where the former president is buried—sadly, alongside several of his children that died at a young age.

There is a quote posted in the grange hall, which one summer served as the summer White House:

*“Christmas is not a time or a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is the real spirit of Christmas. If we think of these things, there will be born a Savior, and over us will shine a star, sending its gleam of hope into the world.”*

Luke tells of the meeting between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth who were both pregnant for the first time. Besides the common bloodlines—the two women shared the remarkable experience of being told by the angel Gabriel that they would bear divinely ordained sons.

They had vastly different experiences. Elizabeth was old and barren---delighted to be having a child after the pain of childlessness. Like Hannah and Sarah before her, she gave birth late in life. To say the least, she is very excited, while her husband is shocked. So much did he doubt the angels (Zechariah told the angel it was impossible)—which made him mute until the child was born. This was so cruel—he had waited long time to have a child—to be so excited and not be able to tell anyone about it!

Mary—a young teenager, was not altogether certain of how and why she was with child. She was still pondering the impossibility of a spirit-conceived pregnancy when she visited her older cousin Elizabeth. When Mary arrives, the baby in Elizabeth's womb moved dramatically—literally jumping for joy. Feeling it, Elizabeth says to her younger cousin, “Blessed are you among all women and blessed is the child you will bear.”

The in-utero jumping for joy inspires Mary so that she broke into song—expressing her joy at being chosen by God for such an important calling.

It is Christmas letter time.

How many of you send out pictures—just pictures?

How many send out just cards with no real notes?

How many put form letters in your cards? How many are essentially fluffy brag sheets?

How many are honest?

We send out a form letter because my Dad always wrote a form letter.

I look forward to some of them—they are actually poetry with family details.

I received one recently that is so detailed—it was four pages long. It covered everything from the health of her pets to the nature of investments to a travel log.

I especially look forward to the letter from my favorite first cousin—I have 27 of them. My cousin Lori is a high school principal in Des Moines, Iowa and her husband, Tim, is a Disciples of Christ Pastor. Tim is a writer of note but Lori does their letter.

It was shorter than normal. First the good news—their son graduated from college, their parents are surviving life threatening ailments. Their family had shared a reunion. They enjoyed travels to renew and refresh.

Then this...."As we listed the high points they seemed altogether puny in the context of the great global sickness that envelops the earth this year. War has settled once more upon us like a chilling fog. Economics are challenging. Diseases have become fiercer and more resistant. Citizens clash with incivility. At Tim's church, the staff is being reduced. The routine "stuff" of a familiar Christmas letter seems hollow. Still, those realities don't represent the whole of our life.

Earlier this year we commissioned a wooden sculpture from a local artist - a colorful "Hallelujah Lady" reaching some five feet tall - around the affirmation of Psalm 118:24 -

*This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

"Rejoice," Sing," "Love," the Hallelujah Lady urges us. In picking her theme, we wanted to be constantly, playfully, reminded of this larger truth. Even in the midst of days when all available evidence obscures divine origin, she stretches her arms with the conviction that each day is a gift from God, arriving full with reasons for joy.

Calling you to mind this holiday season we experience yet another occasion for joy. The gift you are to us is both warmth and light, and we are grateful. We pray that this finds you well, hopeful, and rejoicing in the days that God is creating around you."

Lori's letter reminds me of what John Ortberg says in his book *The Life You've Always Wanted*.

*"We will not understand God until we understand this about him.  
God is the happiest being on earth.*

*God knows sorrow. Jesus is remembered as a man of sorrows and is well acquainted with grief. But the sorrows of God, like the anger of God, is his temporary response to a fallen world.*

*Joy is God's basic character. God is the happiest being on earth."*

When John was brought to the temple on the 8th day to be circumcised and named, people asked what the baby would be called. It was expected that the firstborn son would

be named after his father. Since Zechariah was mute—Elizabeth said, "John." They looked to the father for confirmation and he took a tablet and wrote, "his name is John." Immediately his voice was restored and what does he do? —he erupts in a **song of joy!**

Recently a group of church leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina, invited their favorite son, Dr. Billy Graham, to a luncheon in his honor. Suffering from Parkinson's disease, Graham doesn't get out much any more, but they didn't want a big address, just a chance to honor him.

Of course, after saying many wonderful things about him, they did let him take the podium to say a few words. Dr. Graham told a story about Dr. Albert Einstein, who was traveling from Princeton on a train one time when the conductor came down the aisle asking for tickets. Einstein couldn't find his ticket anywhere -- his pockets, his briefcase, the seat beside him. The conductor said, "Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. Everyone knows who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it." Einstein apologized and thanked the conductor.

As he moved down the aisle, the conductor looked back and saw Einstein on his hands and knees searching under the seat for his ticket. He went back and said, "Dr. Einstein, don't worry about your ticket. I'm sure you bought one. It's no problem. I know who you are."

The great physicist looked up at the conductor and said, "Young man, I too know who I am. The problem is, **I don't know where I am going.**"

Billy Graham then pointed out that he was wearing a brand new suit. He had bought it for the luncheon and one other occasion. "You know what that occasion is?" he asked the Charlotte church leaders. "**This is the suit in which I'll be buried.** But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to remember the suit I'm wearing. I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am; I also know where I'm going."

You remember some of the scenes.

This is the forty-year anniversary of the Charlie Brown Christmas special.

That pathetic Christmas tree they decorate and it looks perfect.

It climaxes with Linus' recitation of the Christmas story...while the kids are singing a Christmas carol.

A "Peanuts" comic strip has Lucy saying that Christmas is a time for kindness and good will, a time when we accept one another, a time when we welcome others into our homes and into our lives.

Charlie Brown responds: "**Why just Christmas? Why can't we be kind and accepting and hospitable all through the year?**"

To which Lucy replies, "What are you? Some kind of a religious fanatic?"

According to Eugene Peterson, "Joy is not a requirement of following Christ, it is a consequence. It is not what we have to acquire in order to experience life in Christ, it is what comes to us when we are walking the way of faith and obedience."

We try to find joy in other places such as entertainment, pleasure, gluttony. But joy cannot be commanded, purchased or arranged. Let's remember that.