

December 18, 2016 “Joy to the World!”

# “Joy to the World!”

Christmas is coming. All around the world, preachers are preaching the message of Christmas. How many times will the song “Joy to the World” be sung this week until Christmas. Christian or non-Christian, we all know this song. We can hear this song playing in the background at supermarkets and even at PACHINKO parlors in Japan.

I would like to preach about why it is sung “Joy to the world”. Yes, I want you to know the meaning of Joy to the world. First of all, I would like to remind you that this is a historical event.

## **Historical Event**

Let us read Luke 2:1-7 of this event.

**2** 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.

The Bible passage I just read was written by Luke. He was a doctor. What is the first thing doctors do when they meet a patient? Yes, they will make sure that they are facing the person and, will open up their medical record to write the date. When we sign important documents, we also sign the date. If we fail to write the date, the document may even become invalid. By writing the date, we justify that this was a legitimate affair. The action of signing the date sets this event as a real occurrence in history.

Maybe because of his occupation, Luke was careful about the time of the incident. He did not write the date, but instead, he wrote the name of historically significant leaders such as Caesar and the governor as a place marker of time. These names are those that have clearly been recorded in other historical documents, making it clear

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that this was a real occurrence of history. The story of Christmas is not a fairy tale. Luke emphasized the authenticity of this story. Let us look the second point, which is an incident that happened in the life of the people. Let us read from verse Luke 2:3-7.

### Event of human life

<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.

Here it is written of the story of Jesus' father Joseph and mother Mary traveling to Bethlehem by the decree of Caesar Augustus to register for the census. As I said, Luke was a doctor, so it was his job to face the sick. He probably asked his patients many questions. "Are you in pain?" "I have backache." "How did it happen?" "Because of this economy, our taxes have increased, forcing me to work everyday from morning to late at night. It must be the result of such strain." Such conversations would have made Luke very receptive to patient life styles to treat their problems.

Therefore Luke made clear the time of the incident and then he mentioned the social occurrences of that time, noting the decree of Augustus Caesar. His decree could not be disobeyed and thus the order was delivered to all territories under his power. The reason for this registration was to properly tax the people and to know the number of men that could be drafted as soldiers.

As we know, an ordinary carpenter like Joseph had no say to the decree of Caesar Augustus. Joseph had to stop his work as carpenter to go to Bethlehem. It took three days to travel on foot. For us, this

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would be like walking from here to the Japanese Consulate in downtown LA.

Not only did Joseph have to stop working, he had to take his pregnant wife with him to Bethlehem. It would have been a tough journey for pregnant woman. No one walks all the way to LA with a pregnant wife on a donkey, but that was the decree of Caesar. They have to obey it.

Dear brothers and sisters, we also face similar situations in our daily lives. I have experienced it. I used to always look at the US immigration website to check their policy because they would change quiet often. Time and effort put into certain preparations could suddenly go to waste because of a change.

When we were applying for our Green Card, our youngest was still an infant and the other two still little. We all went to the immigration office in Chula Vista many times.

Some of you might know the situation. There was a security screening and a guard was always there with a gun. We were prohibited from eating there and I could feel the tense atmosphere under their authority. But children do not understand anything about authority. When they became hungry and they cried, but the guard was still strictly watching us. So my wife went to the restroom with snacks and our children ate the snacks in the restroom.

We were in the position of receiving visas so we need to obey whatever it was they asked of us. We still had it better compared to those from other countries. There are so many people who are suffering under the unreasonable decrees made by their country.

This country does not have an almighty Emperor with absolute authority. But how about the rise and fall of stock s on the stock market or a lay off from a company. It could suddenly happen tomorrow, much like the decree of Augustus. Our lives will be swayed

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by them. We may have to move because of a natural disaster, or the order of a company. This is just like “The Decree of Augustus”. There is a strong wind blowing on us in spite of our wish and willingness.

Luke recorded the date, and he also wrote of the reality of Joseph’s life, which he could not manage by himself, and of how Jesus was born in the midst of an uncontrollable situation. Jesus went to Bethlehem in the shaking womb of Mary on the donkey, and even after their arrival, there was no room for him to stay. He was born among the cows and horses and lay in a manger. Is there anything more realistic than this of human life?

However there is God’s plan in such situations of human reality. What is His plan? Yes, it is a plan designed for us. Hebrew 4:14-16 explains this plan.

Hebrew 4:14-16 said; <sup>14</sup>therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Afterwards, the young couple ran away to Egypt with baby Jesus. Yes they were much like refugees. They returned to Israel and lived in Nazareth of Galilee. Joseph passed away at an early age and Jesus had to support his family as the eldest son by working as a carpenter. There were no Construction Companies during those times, so he must have worked like a handyman. Jesus told many parables and he often used budgets, wages, and interest as a part of these parables. These all came from his personal experiences.

We know Jesus did not encounter credit card fraud, nor did he experience bankruptcy or car theft. However what he experienced every day was very much just like what we face today.

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In such a way, Jesus had experienced the same things we do in every way, just as we are today. Our heavenly father and Jesus both agreed and accepted this.

Have you ever shed tears? Christ has also shed tears. Have you ever been betrayed? Christ was betrayed, too. Have you been hungry and thirsty? Christ has been hungry and thirsty... Have you ever been treated unjustly? Christ was also treated unjustly. Have you ever suffered from a pain? Christ was suffered his pain. Have you ever been agonized? Christ was also agonized. Have you lost a beloved person? Christ also lost his loved ones. Have you ever been refused? Christ was refused, too.

The reason why Jesus Christ was born as a child of Mary was to experience not just one aspect of life but to experience all the matters we face each day. Let us move on to our third point which is "the event of heaven".

### The heavenly Event

So far, we have looked at the recorded "date" or historical context and the incidences we experience in our daily lives. These are easy to understand for us. However, parallel to this, we notice that what is called the revelation of heaven is recorded in the Bible. Yes, an angel appeared before the shepherds and said to them,

<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."

The Bible says that the message was delivered by an angel. This is clearly distinguished from our daily lives, and we may view such event as some sort of fairy tale. Why did Luke, who was a doctor, write such event beyond our understanding along with logical facts and

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observational social backgrounds. Why? There is only one answer for that. It is because the event actually happened.

We are not reading a novel that Luke has written. Like the Bible states, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" in the very beginning of this book, this is a book written about God who is beyond our knowledge and understanding. If we understand everything in the Bible, it is not a book about God. The birth of Jesus Christ is an event marked in our history, and it records his life as a human being, but it is also written along side heavenly matters.

The angel said "You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger". The angel emphasized the baby wrapped in cloths and said "This will be a sign to you". What kind of sign was this baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger?

In fact, the words "to be wrapped in cloth" appears again in the Bible in relation with Jesus. It was also written by Luke. He wrote in Luke 23:53; <sup>53</sup>Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.

I believe you know what Luke is talking about. Yes, Jesus Christ became an adult and was crucified, died, and his body was taken down from the cross and wrapped in linen just like he was wrapped in the manger.

Furthermore, when we look into the traditions from those times, their barn is not like the wood houses we see on Christmas postcards, but they were more like caves. Most people were poor at the time and did not have the means to build one entirely from wood, so it was not uncommon for caves to be modified and used as barns. Therefore, Jesus was likely laid down in the manger in the cave. And we recall what is recorded of in Luke 23:53; "Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock".

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Furthermore, let us remember what the wise men brought to Jesus from the east country. The book of Matthew said, they brought gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). The myrrh was used for dead bodies in that time... Again do you remember after 33 years from this time, a couple of women came to the cave where the body of Jesus was placed? They have something in their hand. What was it that they carried? "On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb" (Luke 24:1). The spices were myrrh.

What is the "sign" shown by being "wrapped in cloth", "born in the cave" and "myrrh was sent"? Yes, it was the sign of Jesus' crucifixion for our sins and also his resurrection from death. Angels delivered the message of this sign.

We are focusing our attention to the message of Christmas during this advent season. We have been examining the failure of man before prior. I mentioned that humans had already failed three times, at the Garden of Eden, the flood of Noah and the tower of Babel. These events happened between Genesis chapter 1- 11. This is how we are as humans and we have not changed since then. We have continued to do many unacceptable things.

The problems we have are a result of our own sins, and because of this fact, we will die. We are overwhelmed by emptiness and we live with the fear of death.

Jesus Christ came into such a world, experienced all that we are experiencing, sacrificed himself for us, and died on the cross. He broke our fear of death, and as written in the Bible, he was resurrected from death. The angels said, this is the sign given of that baby who accomplished all of these things. This is not given only to certain people in certain times but God gave this sign to all people, like you and me, and this is truly a great joy to us.

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God presented His plans through the baby lying in the manger, in the midst of this world filled with tears and sweat. This happened in the same place we know and understand as a human being. This was the time when "an event of the world" and "the heart of God" or in other words, "the pain of the world" and "the love of God" became one. That is the birth of Jesus Christ.

Looking back on these things, we now know, there is only one man who can stand between this world we live in and heaven.

<sup>5</sup> For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

Yes, if there is a mediator between God and us humans, this man is the son of God, he was born in a cave, lived just like us, died on the cross, and was resurrected from death. This man is Jesus Christ. The cross and the empty tomb is full of love for us. That is why we sing the words, "joy to the world".

<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Because of this promise, let us rejoice in Christmas, and let us receive His love this Christmas. Let us pray.

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