

## Joy to the World?

Several months ago – I believe the Lord spoke to me about this service  
And our regular services  
The importance of Joy – praise – laughter  
Services that bring joy – lift us from the heaviness of life

Why? Because there is a heaviness in life – need to be lifted  
It's natural and spiritual

(Isaiah 61:3 NKJV) To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

And I think we need it more than ever before  
I believe that we live in a time where life is “heavier” than ever before  
Let me say it this way – there is gravity  
You can feel the weight of life – news – marriage – health

Even at Christmas – things get hectic...  
Lines get longer  
Kids get whinier  
Patience gets thinner  
Waistlines get thicker  
And your in-laws come to visit – no joy

Joke – Albert screaming in the supermarket  
“Lady, I’m Albert.”

So what do we do?  
Well the opposite of gravity is levity  
The antidote to the heaviness of life...  
Joy – Laughter – Praise

In 2019 – I commit that every experience we have together  
Full of praise – laughter – lifting  
You had to be there

Last year I declared – 2018 The Year of Reconciliation  
I declare 2019 The Year of Great Joy – No Matter What

I think lifting environments are important  
Not only for church – but also for family  
I try to create those as a dad  
Keeps us together – makes us closer – memorable

Story – several weeks ago – day after Thanksgiving  
We have a tradition – make/decorate Christmas cookies  
Together we decorate the Christmas tree  
Got a gift from a pastor friend – Apple HomePod  
Great speaker – connected to Siri  
Siri – tell me a joke – what’s the weather?  
Everyone started shouting out their favorite song – fun

I played them mine – some of you don’t know – I play music  
Led music at my church – predominately African-American  
Gospel music – Jesus, O What a Wonderful Child

I bet you never thought...  
This is what your Christmas service would look like – ha!

Notice something with me though  
In just a few moments – right song – right people – focus on Jesus  
The whole room lifted  
It’s what happened in our kitchen too

Everything about the devil pulls you down  
Everything about our God lifts you up

(Psalm 3:3) But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, my glory and the One  
who lifts up my head.

Sounds Good But...

But then it was time to decorate the tree  
And before it could be decorated – had to deal with this  
(Wadded up strand of lights)

You want joy – its purpose is joy  
Tangled – confusing  
Broken – one part out that affects the rest  
Frustrating – robs you of joy

So I left the room and let Tammy do it – you think I’m kidding  
That’s what so many people do – they settle – leave it

This is what so many people’s lives are like  
They want joy – get a little of it in church environment  
But then you go back to your real life – joy is gone  
Life is a mess

## The Christmas Promise

But notice with me the Christmas story  
The condition they were in – and the announcement of the angels

I want to read a portion of the Christmas story – just 2 verses  
The announcement of the arrival of Jesus  
Picked a group of people to give the first announcement  
Probably the darkest – joy-less group alive at the time

(Luke 2:10-11 NKJV) Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Notice – “good tidings”  
Original language – a set of instructions a plan  
This plan will bring you joy

So the announcement was more than what happened to Jesus  
It was about what was going to happen to us

To “you” – this plan is for you  
Savior – sins forgiven – fresh start  
Christ – one who can bring power for change in your life  
We’ll come back to this

But I want you to know that God has GREAT JOY for you  
This is the promise of Christmas  
Has to go from a cliché to a reality

## So How?

Back to the strand of lights  
When you see a beautiful tree or house with lights  
It didn’t get there by itself

(Psalm 16:11) You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Joy has a path

There is someone who took a journey to do 4 things...  
Same 4 that you and I need to do to get the Christmas Promise

## Untangle the mess.

Nothing can happen until we do – many try to function the way they are  
But God wants to free you – untangle the mess

Some of you need healing – you’ll never have joy until you do  
Isn’t it about time that your life not look like this?  
Addictions – Secrets – Habits

The way we say it around here – find freedom  
I'm personally inviting you to the joy journey in 2019  
**Find our place.**

Before the strand can be beautiful – each individual light fixed  
Unique – dependent on the other – just like you  
In fact – each one is needed for the others to work

You'll never have joy until you do  
Joy is found in purpose

The way we say it around here – Discover Purpose  
I'm personally inviting you to the joy journey in 2019

**Shine so others can see.**

Now the lights can go on display – bring joy to others  
Shine so others can see

(Matthew 5:16) In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Some people leave their lights up all year long – no take them down  
But when it comes to you personally – shine all year long  
That's where real joy is

The way we say it around here – Make a Difference  
I want to personally invite you on the joy journey in 2019

But there is one final step in the journey  
Absolutely necessary – it won't work without it

You've tried to untangle the mess  
You've tried to find your purpose

You've tried to do something that matters

But it won't work until you...

Connect to the source of power and joy.

You can't do this journey without Jesus

That's why so many have failed up to this point

In order for these lights to shine – life change – joy

Not to a religion – but to a person

The person that Christmas is all about – Jesus

The way we say it around here...

Know God – Find Freedom – Discover Purpose – Make a Difference

So I have a challenge for you

Give us a year – take the journey to Great Joy

Give your life to Jesus – connect to the power source

This was the message of the angels

You want great joy?

Behold – notice – embrace – the message of Jesus

There is joy in the journey

## Altar Call

God brought you here – to change your life

(Salvation Prayer)

Invite our ushers to come take their place

In a moment we will light candles

If you prayed that prayer – let us know

Mark the Connection Card in your Worship Guide

No one visit or call – send you your next steps

Offering – for those who want to give – give you an opportunity

Not an expectation – wanted this service to be our gift

We are in a season of Legacy – still be a part until the end of the year

After the white bucket passes – offering connection cards

Black bucket – on right hand side of your row – candles

Offering prayer

Stay seated and sing this song with us

Receive offering and pass out candles

(I Will Build My Life)

## Candle Lighting

Let's all stand together

Candle lighting

Beautiful picture of what God wants to do in you

Message of hope to you for a brighter more beautiful year

I'll light the first one – join us in singing

(Silent Night)

My Christmas Prayer

Don't give up hope – your life is not too tangled to be beautiful again

But commit to a process – give us a year

Don't just celebrate Christmas – experience it

Blow candles out – we'll collect them back from you at the doors

**Closing Song – Jesus, Oh What Wonderful Child**

(Dismissed by worship leaders)