

B Christmas 2 Hymn Sing and Luke 2:22-40

We are in still in the season of joy! The season of joy and glory.

That's why I thought it would be fun to "ring" in the new year with bells, every time we hear the words **joy** and **glory**. (Except during my sermon 😊!)

Frederick Buechner, in his book Wishful Thinking (p. 47), tells us that in the gospel of John, "Jesus sums up pretty much everything by saying, 'these things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.' (John 15:11)" He said this at the Last Supper just before his death."

Buechner goes on to say, "Happiness turns up more or less where you'd expect it to—a good marriage, a rewarding job, a pleasant vacation. Joy on the other hand, is as notoriously unpredictable as the one who bequeaths it.

So Joy is not the same thing as happiness.

I found a story that demonstrates this difference:

There was a couple who had known each other as fellow church members for many years. Somewhere along the line, love blossomed and grew between them, and the whole church rejoiced when they announced their wedding plans.

A couple years later, the church rejoiced again when this couple announced they were pregnant. They had been older when they'd married, and had had difficulty conceiving. Finally, after fertility treatments, they learned they were expecting twins. That was a double joy, because

the doctor told them that, because of their age, this was probably their only chance at having children of their own.

Sadly, the babies were born many weeks premature. Despite the doctors' best efforts, they lived only a few hours -- just long enough for the parents to hold them and bestow upon them the names they had chosen from the start: Abraham Joseph and Sarah Mary, names that, according to their faith, express the fulfillment of God's promise.

And so it happened that, when this couple should have been talking with their pastor about baptisms, they were taking with him about a funeral. Together the three of them planned the service, and when the question of music came up, the parents asked if someone could play the song, "What a Wonderful World." That struck the pastor as a bit unusual, but under the circumstances, of course he said yes.

The service was emotional for everyone. As the pastor pronounced the benediction at the end, he could see the grief reflected in every face. Then, as had been previously planned, someone punched a button on a CD player, and into the church floated the gravelly voice of Louis Armstrong, singing "What a Wonderful World."

What happened next, no one expected. The husband rose to his feet and opened his arms. His wife stood, too, and drew herself close to him. And then, arm in arm, they danced.

The two of them danced a dance of life, clear across the chancel of that church: for they knew, beyond a doubt,

that, **when suffering comes, the kingdom of heaven is near.** They knew that life is sometimes ambiguous, filled with contradictions. They knew that sometimes things happen that no one can explain. Yet they also knew, the two of them, that nothing -- no heartache, no grief, no loss -- could ever separate them, nor their children, from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH 1ST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS, PASTOR ROB O'BERG JANUARY 1, 2017 original source not named)

This is not a story about happiness but it is a story about joy.

Today's gospel lesson is also one of joy.

8 days after Jesus' birth, his parents brought him to be consecrated. This is something all Jewish parents did.

He was presented to the Lord and a sacrifice was made. While they were there, an old man named Simeon saw the baby Jesus. Many years before Simeon had been promised that he would see the Messiah before he died. And as Simeon looked at Mary and Joseph's little boy, he knew that the promise had been fulfilled. **Here was the Messiah for whom he had waited and watched.**

Simeon sang a song, *"Lord now let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."* (Nunc Dimittis)

This was a song of joy but not a happy song because Simeon saw something more. He looked into the face of Mary and he also saw the fate of this Messiah. He would suffer and die and so Simon went on to tell Mary, *"A sword will pierce through your soul."*

On Christmas Eve we look in the manger and sing "Joy to the World."

By the end of the 12 days of Christmas, we remember that **the manger leads to the cross.**

But our joy is no less joyous.

In Christ there can be joy even in the midst of suffering.

Furthermore, it is precisely when Joy and suffering intersect that God's glory is best revealed.

When suffering comes, God's glory is near.

I conclude with one final bible verse from 1 Peter 4:13

Listen first:

*But **rejoice** insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.*

Now be ready to ring out on the words Joy and glory:

*But **rejoice (ring)** insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout **for joy (ring)** when his **glory (ring)** is revealed.*

This is the good news whether we are happy or suffering. This is the good news of the Gospel.