

The Christmas music playing in the stores these days drips with sweetness. The scent wafting from the oven as a new batch of Christmas cookies bake is even sweeter. And the visions of the faces of loved ones beaming with joy because of the gift you thoughtfully purchased them is even sweeter still. Behind all of it is the marketing of joy. And yet, for all the joy that we are promised this time of year, there are many who are far removed from joy. Mourning for loved ones, anxious over strained finances, uncertain whether or not they'll hear from estranged family members—some are expecting a blue Christmas.

Joy can be hard to come by. Where will you find it? Right here. This season brings joy as you anticipate Christ's birth. But it takes time to arrive at His birth. We are tempted to jump the gun, skip over Advent, and get right to Christmas. But that's not how life works. The things that bring us joy don't come easily but require some patience. And as we wait, distractions tend to come in and rob us of joy. And into the void flows sorrow. So just when joy should be flooding upon us, it escapes us. As elusive as joy can be, sorrow takes hold far too easily. But you are blessed as the wise men come full of joy.

And you can rejoice *with* the wise men, for Christ answers your sorrow. Rejoice. For you do have reason for joy! Consider everything that you enjoy. God provides you with daily bread—everything that has to do with the support and needs of your body and even more than you need. And He richly blesses you in your daily bread! Consider: God could have just given you food for sustenance, and that by itself would be very good. But He goes beyond that and makes food delicious and savory and satisfying! He could have just given you a house to live in to shelter you from the elements, and that by itself would be very good. But He goes beyond that and makes your house be that place that also brings you warmth and fuzziness and that irreplaceable feeling of being your home. So we have ample reason for joy because of God's grace, yet far too easily we are distracted from joy.

Herod was distracted. The wise men arrived in Jerusalem looking for the One who had been born King of the Jews. Herod called the scribes so they could tell him where Jesus was born. The answer could be found in the words of the prophet Micah. The promise of the Lord delivered by the prophets was finally fulfilled. What generations of the faithful had been longing to see, what so many had spent their lives desiring, now stood fulfilled! And that was reason for joy! But not for Herod. He is distracted from joy by power and his love of the status quo. So, he plotted to kill the Christ Child to safeguard his own power. He was quite content with the way things were and would not tolerate a perceived rival to his throne.

And once joy departs, sorrow finds a home. You know what that is, maybe in the opposite direction of Herod. You have been distracted from joy by your *lack* of power so that you sorrow over things never seeming to go your way. "Why, oh why, can't things work the way I want them to just this once?" Notice what happens. With focus upon what you don't have, you lose sight of what you do have, and so joy flees. Rather than rejoicing in the bounty God provides you with—your daily bread and more—you are distracted by frustration *with* the status quo. You covet more; you covet what others enjoy. Instead of seeing the Lord's bounty given to you, you see what others have and what you do not have.

And when joy departs, sorrow makes its home in your heart. Sorrow is much worse than sadness. Sadness comes and goes, but sorrow remains for prolonged periods. The longer it stays, the more piercing it becomes. See then how sorrow is the antithesis of joy. Joy requires patience as you wait for the realization of what you desire—waiting for graduation, waiting for marriage, waiting for a birth, waiting for Christmas. But sorrow feeds off your impatience so that the longer you must go without having what you desire, the deeper sorrow becomes. Sorrow tells you that joy does not come from waiting, that your desire must be satisfied right now! Can you recognize times when sorrow has robbed you of joy?

However it has happened, Christ answers your sorrow by who He is. He will not be who Herod wants Him to be—a rival who can easily be killed so that power can be preserved and the status quo maintained. And He won't be who *you* want Him to be—a servant who bows to your every desire, treating *you* as if you were the king, upending the status quo so that things can be just as you want them *right now*. Jesus will only be who you *need* Him to be. He'll be far more than you *want*.

You see who He is when the wise men arrive. Matthew says that when they saw the child, they fell down and worshiped Him. A more accurate translation would be that falling down, they prostrated themselves to Him. Thirty years later, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary would find Jesus outside an empty tomb, and they would do the same thing. Then the Eleven disciples would meet Jesus in Galilee and prostrate themselves to Jesus as well. All of them, laid down before the Christ in reverence and submission. And you only prostrate yourself like that before God. The wise men knew it. The women at the tomb knew it. The disciples knew it.

And that prostration reveals joy. The women at the tomb were overjoyed to see Jesus resurrected, and so were the disciples. And we have reason for joy too, because this is the kind of God that we have—the kind that chooses to humble Himself to be born not in legendary Jerusalem, but in lowly Bethlehem. The kind that chooses to die and rise that you might have what you need—forgiveness and salvation—rather than what you want. This King's greatness is found in His humility. So Matthew tells us that the wise men ***“rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”*** Literally, rejoiced a great joy greatly. Almost sounds redundant, but Matthew is making the point that there is plenty of reason for joy, and it's all because Jesus is who He is.

There's so much mystery in this text, who the wise men are, where they came from, how this guiding star worked. Much has been made of all of these mysterious details, much like much has been made about the gifts that they bring. But notice how all of those details remain mysterious to us, because they're not the important parts of this account. The focus of this account and the important detail is who this Jesus is. He's the God who gives you not what you want, but exactly what you need—His coming in the flesh, His dying and rising in the flesh, all so that you have been given forgiveness, so that you are now saved.

As we just sang, “He whom sages, westward faring. . . humbly worshiped, off'rings sharing.” Why worship this child? Because the Lord has revealed to the wise men who this child was and why He had come. “Lying helpless in a manger, poor and bare and lowly, to set you free from all your sorrow wholly.” Yes, “God's own Son is born a child, God the Father is reconciled.” Amen.