

The First Christmas Spirit

(Luke 1:39-56)

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Introduction

As Christmas approaches in less than 2 weeks, there is much talk in the world about the so-called “Christmas Spirit.”

In A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens, Ebenezer Scrooge is seen as a man without the Christmas Spirit because he didn't like being around people and spending money...

Which seem to the world to be the opposite of the Christmas Spirit..

But what in fact is the Christmas Spirit?

It is the shopping rush we get from buying presents?

Is it the anticipation of the presents we will get from others?

Is it the family reunion that we may attend or the time we will share with loves ones around a Christmas meal?

Is it the tree or the decorations of Christmas?

Is it the lights or the kids waiting on Santa?

What is the Christmas spirit and how do we get it?

Well, if you listen to the world, you think that the Christmas spirit starts the day after Halloween as the stores exchange their black and gold for red and green...

Which by the way is an earlier start to the Christmas spirit than ever before...

We used to be able to get through Thanksgiving before we began to think about Christmas but no more..

Christmas now follows the schedule of Walmart, and people are expected to be in the Christmas spirit even before they have digested their thanksgiving turkey..

In addition to the timing of the Christmas spirit, the world also influences the emotions of the Christmas spirit..

The world says that you must be happy that Christmas is coming even if it financially straps your family...

Even if it reminds you of lost loved ones...

Even if you are lonely and alone on the holiday, the world's definition of the Christmas says to smile and be happy anyway...

Now all of that pressure from the world's idea of the Christmas spirit plays on our emotions and even our actions during this part of the year..

So people with little money go further into debt in order to make unwise purchases and further into debt in order to experience the supposed Christmas spirit...

And people with heavy hearts are forced to put on happy faces so that they can fake the Christmas spirit and make everyone else feel better while they grieve alone...

You see, the worlds' definition of the Christmas spirit says that you must have it and show it or we will call you a scrooge until you get on board...

But my friends, that is the not the Christmas spirit at all...

So what is this idea of the Christmas spirit and how do we experience it?

Well, there is no place to define it that to look to the word of God..

And as we look to the word of God, let us look at the lead up to the very first Christmas...

And let us see what was the attitude of the people as Christmas approached for the very first time..

To do this, we have to turn to the first chapter of the book of Luke...

Luke was a physician so he was a very detailed person and God used his to write 2 important books of the Bible...

The first is the gospel of Luke and the second was the book of Acts...

And Luke's attention to detail in those books came in handy as the gospel of Luke gives us the most detailed history of the birth of Christ...

While the book of Acts gives us a detailed history of the birth of the church...

Now, the history of Jesus' birth has a number of characters...

Certainly, there is Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus, but we also have a supporting cast as well, made of the shepherds, wise men, angels, an inn keeper...

But we often forget the others who had a role in the days leading up the first Christmas....

And that would include the cousin of Mary named Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias...

However for our purposes of identifying a true Christmas spirit, we are going to spend our time looking at just two of the these people...

The first will be Elizabeth and her unborn son John...

And then we will turn our attention to Mary...

And as we read and learn about these characters in the book of Luke, my hope is that we will discover the true spirit of Christmas while repenting of the world's idea of the Christmas spirit...

So, let's begin in Luke 1:1, and remind ourselves of the background and the lead up to what could be called the very first Christmas...

Luke 1:1...

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things [a]accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning [b]were eyewitnesses and [c]servants of the [d]word, 3 it seemed fitting for

me as well, having [e]investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been [f]taught.

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named [g]Zacharias, of the division of [h]Abijah; and he had a wife [i]from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in [j]years.

8 Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. 11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear [k]gripped him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will [l]give him the name John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will

rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit [m]while yet in his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 17 It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in [n]years." 19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who [o]stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

21 The people were waiting for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them; and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he kept [p]making signs to them, and remained mute. 23 When the days of his priestly service were ended, he went back home. 24 After these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant, and she [q]kept herself in seclusion for

five months, saying, 25 “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.”

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin [r]engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the [s]descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was [t]Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, [u]favored one! The Lord [y]is with you.” 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” 34 Mary said to the angel, “How [w]can this be, since I [x]am a virgin?” 35 The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the [y]holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and [z]she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For [aa]nothing will be impossible

with God.” 38 And Mary said, “Behold, the [ab]bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Now all of that background is to prepare us for what we are going to see in verses 39-56...

Which could be called the first Christmas season...

Elizabeth is miraculously 6 months pregnant in her old age..

Mary is pregnant as a very young girl..

And the Lord has set up a meeting between them, and this meeting and Mary’s reaction to it will be the text that will help us understand and adopt the true spirit of Christmas...

So, let’s look at verses 39-45 and get one aspect of the Christmas spirit, which is..

I. The Christmas Spirit is Our Anticipation
(39-44)

39 Now [ac]at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And [ad]how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.

There is no question that anticipation is part of the Christmas spirit...

In fact, in my opinion, this is the essence of the Christmas spirit for most people in the world...

As they eagerly await to get a present or to see the reaction of the people to whom they give presents..

Or maybe it is the anticipation of a little time off from work or the anticipation of seeing family that you seldom see..

Or possibly it is the anticipation of just having a break for the normal routines of life..

To be able to sleep later and watch TV...

I definitely think that anticipation is part of the world's idea of the Christmas spirit as people count down the days to Christmas...

And you know why I think that much of the Christmas spirit is anticipation?

Because as soon as it gets here, the spirit of Christmas is gone..

Some people take down their trees on Christmas day...

Some people remove all the decoration much faster than they went up...

If we truly had a biblical spirit of Christmas, then it will last well beyond Dec 25...

However, that is not to say that anticipation should not be a part of a biblical Christmas spirit...

Because guess what?

Mary and Elizabeth and most surprisingly, the unborn John the Baptist were living in anticipation of Jesus' birth...

I just love the fact that John jumped in Mary's womb..

This is a leap of joy and anticipation and excitement that the Messiah is coming into the world...

If you think big picture in terms of Jesus' birth, it had been predicted way back in Genesis 3 when God told Eve that her seed would eventually crush the head of the serpent...

In all reality, that is the first telling of the Christmas story...

Eve, one of your descendants will give birth to one that will destroy the serpent who led you and Adam into sin...

And that promise to Eve had been passed down through the generations to Noah, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob to Joseph to Moses to David...

All throughout the OT, the promise of a coming Savior was handed down from generation to generation...

In a very real sense, the story of the OT and the nation of Israel is a story of anticipation...

When will this savior come?

When will Messiah come?

When will our sins be forgiven instead of covered over for a while?

When will our true King come?

When will our persecution and strife be over?

We are talking 1000s of years of anticipation for a Messiah, and now right here in Luke 1, we are just months away from the birth of this Savior...

And just the sound of Mary's voice causes John the Baptist to leap in his mother's womb...

I played basketball in high school, and one of my teammates kept a brown bag in his locker or took it with him when we played away...

And the reason is this...

Before almost every game, he would get so ready to play and be filled with so much anticipation of the game that he would hyperventilate..

So he would take out that bag and breath into it to slow down his breathing...

That is what anticipation did to him....

So it is no wonder that Joh the Baptist is leaping in his mother's tummy...

The anticipation is about to become reality...

Now, how did God do that?

Well, if you remember John the Baptist is filled with Spirit of God while he was in the womb...

And the Spirit of God can even move us physically if necessary which seems to be the case when John hears the sounds of Mary's greeting...

This is the Christmas spirit of anticipation...

Now obviously, we live on this side of the birth of Jesus...

So, we can't anticipate his birth, but we can anticipate his return....

We can't look forward to his first coming but we can look forward to his second coming...

This is the Christmas spirit of the Bible as the celebration of the birth of Christ is a reminder to anticipate the return of Christ...

It's fine to count down the days until Christmas, but it is much better to count down the days until the rapture of the church...

We don't live with our eyes on a tree going up in our living room, we live with our eyes on the people of God going up to heaven...

The Christmas spirit is the spirit of anticipation of the return of Christ...

A second aspect of the biblical Christmas spirit is found in verse 45...

The spirit of Christmas is not only our anticipation...

But also...

II. The Christmas Spirit is Our Belief (45)

After Mary and Elizabeth talk a while, Elizabeth pronounces a blessing on Mary in verse 45...

45 And blessed is she who [ae]believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her [af]by the Lord.”

Mary is blessed to be the mother of the son of God but she is also blessed because she believed the promise of God to make her the mother of Christ..

Now Elizabeth is the one who makes this statement and how ironic is this...

Remember her husband is the one who can't talk now because he didn't believe what God spoke to him through the angel...

While Mary believed and is now in position of blessing from God...

This is why our trust in the word of God is so important...

To be skeptical of its truthfulness is to put yourself in a place of cursing, but to embrace all of it is to put yourself in a place of blessing...

The Christmas spirit is belief and it is not the belief in make believe, but it is belief in God and his promises...

Mary was a pregnant teenage virgin but she believed what God told her was going to happen...

Zacharias was a priest in the temple but he didn't believe what was going to happen...

Mary was blessed and Zacharias was cursed...

Remember...

5

***Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.***

6

***In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.***

The Christmas spirit is not a trust in things that aren't real but putting our faith in a real God who word is sure...

So, the Christmas spirit of the Bible is a spirit of our anticipation of Christ's Second Coming...

And a spirit of trust in God...

But thirdly,.....

III. The Christmas Spirit is Our Worship (46)

Verse 46...

***46 And Mary said:
“My soul [ag]exalts the Lord,***

As Mary has believed God and trusted in Him and then had her situation confirmed by Elizabeth and even the unborn Joh the Baptist, she is overcome with worship of God....

And that comes out in verse 46...

And since we just talked about worship recently, notice once again that worship is from the inside not because of what happens on the outside....

Notice that Mary’s.....soul exalts the Lord...

This is deep worship from within the heart of Mary direct toward God...

It is love for God...

It is adoration of God...

It is appreciation of God...

It is gratitude toward God...

Mary's heart and soul adores God...

And word used here is exalts the Lord...

The greek word is "megalynei"...

Mega meaning much magnification of God...

In other words...

My souls makes God much larger....

This is a great way to think of worship...

Or worship makes God bigger...

Fist of all in our own lives....

But also in the eyes of the world...

Mary magnified the Lord in her worship...

He was made bigger in her life and her worship
made god bigger to the people around her...

That is what the true Christmas spirit is all about...

It is about making God's name bigger in the
world...

Unfortunately, that is the not the Christmas spirit of the world...

What does the world's Christmas spirit make bigger?

It makes us bigger...

We got bigger presents...

We gave bigger presents to our kids...

We had a bigger supper or a bigger get together or a better party...

The world's Christmas spirit magnifies people, but the Christmas spirit of the Bible magnifies God...

Lord, help us to have the spirit of God-centered worship and not man-centered worship at Christmas...

We will continue this next week, but let's look at one final aspect of the true Christmas spirit in verse 47...

IV. The Christmas Spirit is Our Joy (47)

Mary continues her reaction to God's work in her life in verse 47...

47

And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

The true Christmas spirit is a sense of joy...

Mary rejoiced in what was happening to her...

And joy is not a product of this world...

Joy must come from heaven because world is not always filled with joy...

People get sick...

Friends and family pass away...

Jobs are lost and relationships end...

And if the source of our joy are the events of this world, our joy will never last because the world is always fallen...

However if our joy is not based upon the events of this world, it can never be diminished by what happens here...

Mary rejoiced...

It wasn't that she was happy over what was happening to her...

She was a pregnant unwed teenager...

She was engaged to a young man who wasn't going to believe her story...

She was poor and about to be shunned by her society...

How could she possibly rejoice at the news of what was happening in her life?

Well, she had a heavenly reason for joy...

Look at the end of this verse...

She was rejoicing that she was pregnant with the one who would be a Savior in her own life...

You see, Mary as a young teenager understood something that many older people never understand and some people never get...

Mary knew that her biggest problems were not an angry fiancé or a society and culture that would shun her...

Mary knew that her biggest problem was her own sin and her separation from God...

And when she realized that she was going to give birth to the one promised to Eve long ago, she knew that she was giving birth to the one who would not only save others from their sins but save her as well..

I love the lyrics of Mary Did You Know? that say....

This child that you deliver,

Will soon deliver you...

You see, joy is hard to find if you look for it in the world is hard to find and more difficult to keep...

But the joy of having your sins forgiven is a joy that no one can take...

And Mary though she had plenty of reasons to be anxious and nervous simply rejoiced because her Savior from her sin was now in her womb...

The world will tell you that the Christmas spirit is a spirit of joy, but it is not the joy of this world...

It is the joy of having a Savior who has delivered you from your sins once for all...

I don't care if you get a present or give a present...

I don't care if you celebrate Christmas with 100s or
all by yourself...

There is joy in Christmas if you have trusted in
Christ as the savior from your sins...

Because that is joy not of this world but a joy given
by God..

Conclusion

Well, that gets us halfway to the having a true biblical understanding of the Christmas spirit...

We will pick up here next week in verse 48 and look at 4 additional aspects of the Christmas spirit in the word of Mary leading up the very first Christmas...

Let us pray...

V. The Christmas Spirit is Our Humility (48)

VI. The Christmas Spirit is God's Mercy (49-50)

VII. The Christmas Spirit is God's Power (51-52)

VIII. The Christmas Spirit is God's Faithfulness (53-55)