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Sermon: December 12, 2010  
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“ADVENT JOY”**  
Luke 2:8-16

□ **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”** (Luke 2:10)

✳ The way retailers hype their products one might think the **“good news of great joy”** was: “Today in the city of David the iPod Touch is given to you, the Xbox 360 Kinect console, and the Droid II Android cell phone.”

Really?! Is that the **“good news”**?

→ This is not a rant against material gifts or even our culture’s addiction to hi-tech gadgets, much less the ownership of tangible **“stuff.”** {Gen 1:1} **“In the beginning God created the”** physical **“heavens and... earth.”** God {Ge 2:7, 23} **“formed a man”** and **“made a woman”** with real bodies, and when God surveyed this material world {Ge 1:31} **“he had made”** he **“saw [that] it was very good.”**

☹ To be sure, nothing in the physical universe is now as good as God intended. {Ro 8:21} **“Creation”** is in **“bondage to decay”**: it {Ro 8:20, 22} **“is groaning”** under the devastation inflicted upon it by our sins.

☞ Materialistic greed is one. {Col 3:5} **“Greed is idolatry”** and {1 Ti 6:10} **“the love of money”** (and what it buys) **“is a root of all kinds of evil”** – abuse of the earth, fiscal irresponsibility, stinginess, envy, injustice, violence, and so forth. Not only so, greed is a hallmark of North American culture.

☞ In addition, Christmas presents make false promises. They guarantee satisfaction. They claim that once we have them we won’t need anything else.

But give it a few months. The “wow” factor will wear off, the technology will pass into obsolescence, and our treasures will break or rust or wear out.

☺ Still, we should enjoy giving and receiving gifts. God started the tradition, and he is the most extravagant giver!

☆ Material gifts have an important place in our celebration. They remind us that the **“good news of great joy”** is all about the greatest gift ever, the gift of God’s one and only Son.

□ **“The angel said, ‘... I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’”**

✳ The way lifestyle gurus pitch it, the **“good news”** is that **“great joy”** is wrapped up in elegant ornaments, delicious banquets and lavish libations, all presented effortlessly by the perfect hostess.

Does Martha Stewart have the **“good news”**?

This is not an attack on aesthetic beauty, gastronomic pleasure or the art of hospitality. Who invented beauty? Who has blessed us with taste buds? Who invites us to his heavenly feast and even brings the party to us (as at Cana)? Isn’t it the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

☹ But things have gone wrong. We have twisted beauty into vanity, perverted the goodness of eating and drinking into gluttony and starvation, and ruined hospitality with our pride and one-upmanship.

☞ Even at their best the trimmings and trappings can only take us so far. Beauty fades, ornaments tarnish, and snow gets dirty. The cookie plate and cup of cheer leave us feeling crabby, bloated, and a bit hung over (even when the punch is non-alcoholic). Few parties go off without a hitch, and even the ones that do have to end sometime. *Enjoyment* does not necessarily translate into real *joy*.

☺ Nevertheless, as those who love and serve the Creator of all beauty, provision, and {Jas 1:17} “**every [other] good and perfect gift,**” our decor should be the loveliest, our feasts the most satisfying, and our parties the most fun. We should excel at these pleasures.

☆ The frills have an important place in our celebration. They remind us that “**good news of great joy**” is all about the pleasures of beauty, provision, and hospitality of God in Christ Jesus.

☐ “**The angel said, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.’**”

✳ Some popular songs imply that “**the news of great joy**” is that “**I’ll be home for Christmas,**” and {*Home for the Holidays*} “**If you want to be happy in a million ways, for the holidays – you can’t beat home, sweet home!**”

Is this the “**good news**”? Really?

→ This is not a criticism of our focus on family and friends. God places a premium on relationships. In the beginning he said, {Ge 2:18} “**It is not good for the man to be alone,**” then he created the woman. He is the One who {Ps 68:6} “**sets the lonely in families.**”

☹ But some of us have mixed emotions about this, don’t we? The truth that {Ro 3:23} “**all have sinned and fall**

**short of the glory of God**” still applies at Christmas; if anything, holiday get-togethers seem to bring out the worst in people. Many a Christmas is ruined by the drunk uncle, the sharp-tongued mother-in-law, the combative brother, or the bratty child.

Thankfully, many of us have precious memories of Christmases filled with laughter, conversation, and powerful affection. Still, those wonderful times are bittersweet, for they do not last. In fact, their fleeting quality is part of what makes them so special.

☺ Having said this, we should prioritize and strengthen our connections with family, friends, and neighbors. God is pleased when we {Ps 133:1} “[join] **together in unity!**” and Christ equips his people to love others well.

☆ Relationships have a crucial place in our celebration. They remind us that “**good news of great joy**” is all about the relationships of reconciliation and redemption that God initiated at the First Advent of Jesus.

The problem with our crass, frenzied, materialistic, increasingly secular observance of Christmas is not that people are finding too much gladness in gifts, having too much fun with the frills, and getting too much pleasure out of our parties. The real problem is that they are finding too little pleasure, having too little fun, getting too little enjoyment.

☑ At their best the gifts and trappings and gatherings are signposts that point to the profound realities of the greatest gift, highest pleasure, and best

relationships that are wrapped up in Jesus. But many never get there because they mistake the signs for the destination.

☑ To put it another way, we act a bit like **dogs**. (No offense intended!) What do most pets do when you point? They stare at the end of your finger. You want the animal to see a distant object or look in a certain direction; but it doesn't.

We make do with cheap trinkets when God offers us priceless treasures. We content ourselves with tawdry tinsel, reheated leftovers and a few laughs when God has prepared exquisite beauty, delectable feasts and exhilarating celebrations. We resign ourselves to brief, shallow meetings when God invites us into deep, eternal relationship with him and others.

In short, we settle for dipping our toes in a teaspoon of happiness when God is eager and able to plunge us into an ocean of joy.

☐ Luke 2:10-11: **“The angel said, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.’”**

Let's not settle for less. Let us experience the full measure **“of great joy”** that explodes out of this **“good news”**: 2,000 years ago Christ came to us as an infant; in the future (maybe soon) he will come again as {Rev 19:16} **“King of kings and Lord of lords.”**

Joy to the world! The Lord is come!