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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“GREAT JOY FOR ALL”**  
Luke 2:10-11

■ **“I bring you good news of *great joy*.”** That is what the angel told the shepherds in Luke 2:10.

★ Not moderate or measured or cautious joy. Extravagant, brimming, abundant joy, such as Ebenezer Scrooge experiences at the end of *A Christmas Carol*.

☑ Scrooge is a cold-hearted materialist who hates humanity. One Christmas Eve four spirits haunt him, warning that unless he changes he will be condemned to eternal torment in chains of his own making.

He sees the truth, repents of his sin, and is saved from damnation. Dizzy with joy, Ebenezer dances around his bedroom. He is so ecstatic that his housekeeper and passersby think he has lost his mind.

? Don't you long for **“great joy”**? Don't we all?

I am not talking about incessant euphoria. Such pathological mania would be a debilitating mental illness.

I mean real joy that enhances our delight in happy circumstances and sustains us in hard times. Substantial joy that imbues us with wisdom, courage, and perseverance. Redemptive joy that turns loss and suffering into catalysts for growth and beauty.

? The angel brings **“good news of great joy”**! What is that news?

■ It is the announcement that **“a Savior has been born ... he is the Messiah, the Lord”** (Luke 2:11).

{Lk 2:16-17} This brought **“great joy”** to the shepherds. They **“hurried off to find”** the newborn Messiah, then they jubilantly **“spread the word concerning what”** they saw and heard.

{Lk 2:22-32} It brought **“great joy”** to Simeon. Forty days after Jesus' birth Joseph and Mary came to the temple for the rites of purification. **“Moved by the Spirit,”** Simeon found them, took Jesus in his arms, and joyfully praised God.

{Lk 2:36-38} It brought **“great joy”** to Anna. As Simeon spoke she **“came up to them ... gave thanks to God and [prophesied] about the child.”**

{Mt 2:9-10} It brought **“great joy”** to the Wise Men. **“When they saw the star” “over the [house] where the”** Holy Family was living, **“they were overjoyed.”**

{Is 9:2-3} Amazingly, this **“great joy”** was foretold by the Prophet Isaiah more than 600 years earlier:

**The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.  
You have ... increased their joy;  
They rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest.**

Twenty centuries later and half a world away, Christ's nativity is still *the* best **“good news.”** **“A Savior has been born to [us]; he is the Messiah, the Lord”**!

The angel was right. The birth of Jesus is **“good news of great joy”**!

■ But that was not the full extent of his proclamation. He said, **“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”**

★ Not for *some*, **“for all.”** This **“great joy”** is for the poor and the rich, for the nameless and the famous. It is for sub-par schmucks and the highly gifted. It is for lazy do-nothings and hard-working movers and shakers. It is for incorrigible criminals and fine, upstanding citizens. It is for Atheists and pagans and Muslims and Christians.

{Lk 1:52-53} However, though the **“good news”** of the Savior is for everyone, it often sounds better to some than to others. Mary **“rejoices in God [her] Savior”** because

**He has brought down rulers ...  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.**

{Lk 4:18-19} Early in his ministry Messiah declares:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for  
the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

☑ To borrow Dicken’s imagery, in Christ God has healed Tiny Tim and saved Bob Cratchit. He has thrown open the debtors’ prisons, and liberated everyone who was trapped in the workhouses.

Of course, the Lord is merciful and kind to the wealthy as much as to the destitute. Nevertheless, affluence and power tend to deafen our ears to the good news.

{Mt 19:24-25} Matthew, Mark, and Luke alike tell about the young ruler who declined salvation to keep his fortune. Jesus warns that **“It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom ... I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.”**

{Mt 19:26} But take heart! **“With human beings this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”**

☑ Going back to *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge is grasping, covetous, hard-hearted. He has deliberately eradicated every trace of compassion from his soul. He has sacrificed friendship and marriage to the false god Mammon. He deserves earthly misery and eternal torment.

What he gets is mercy and kindness, and he is overcome with rapturous delight. **“I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy, I am as giddy as a drunken man.”** His joy is so contagious, I feel it every time!

Ebenezer is merely a fictional character. But Levi (or Matthew) the tax collector was real – and he was worse than Scrooge!

Levi served the Roman conquerors, so he was a traitor to Israel. He overtaxed his neighbors and pocketed the difference, so he was a thief. He chose

his work knowing that he would be banned from the Temple and synagogues and festivals, so he was a blasphemer. He took his job knowing it would humiliate his family, so he was unfilial.

Why did he do it? For one reason, and one reason only: to get filthy rich.

{Lk 5:27-28} What did Messiah do when he saw Levi doing his dirty work? He stopped, looked him in the eye, and said, **“Follow me.”**

I picture the tax collector asking, ‘Who, me?’ When the Lord nods yes, he “[gets] **up**, [leaves] **everything**” – his booth, his possessions, his money hoard, his property – **“and [follows] him.”**

{Mk 3:14-15} Not only did the Son of God say **“Follow me,”** he named Levi one of the Twelve. Christ **“appointed”** this man to **“be with him and ... to preach and ... to drive out demons.”**

Imagine his **“great joy”!**

Levi was an intentional traitor, thief, blasphemer, and black sheep. He violated the most sacred bonds. He merited damnation.

Then Christ Jesus spoke – not in judgement, but with forgiveness! Not in condemnation, but to create life and purpose and fellowship with God!

He came as the Savior, even for Levi. Even for our worst enemies. Even for you and me.

Let us hear and believe and exult in the **“good news of great joy that [is] for all the people. A Savior has been born to [us]; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”**

Amen!