

#99
December 29, 2019

Joy is not optional

1 John 1:1-4 (HCSB)

1 What was from the beginning,
what we have heard,
what we have seen with our eyes,
what we have observed
and have touched with our hands,
concerning the Word of life—
2 that life was revealed,
and we have seen it
and we testify and declare to you
the eternal life that was with the Father
and was revealed to us—
3 what we have seen and heard
we also declare to you,
so that you may have fellowship along with us;
and indeed our fellowship is with the Father
and with His Son Jesus Christ.
4 We are writing these things^[a]
so that our^[b] joy may be complete.



Did your true love give to you 5 golden rings today? How about the 4 calling birds, 3 French hens, 2 turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree? Today is the 5th day of Christmas. There are 12 days in the Christmas season of the church calendar. Most

of us think that Christmas is over on December 26 but it actually lasts until Epiphany on January 6.

So, Merry Christmas! Are you having a “Mary” Christmas? Did you have a Christ centered Christmas Day? Praise God that Christmas is not only on December 25. In fact, any time a person experiences the birth of Christ in his or her heart, it is Christmas.

May this season continue to be a time of Christ and for Christ. As long as we breath, we have time for life in Christ. By the grace of God, we are given this moment to hear the Word of Life and to receive it by faith. Praise God for God’s Holy Spirit who moves us closer to God.



In Lithuania, as in many countries of the world, the most common means of transportation is by shuttle bus between communities, large and small. There are also lots of buses connecting bigger cities, like we have here in US.

One day my mother was taking a bus from one side of Lithuania to the other which is a 5-hour journey. She purchased her ticket, went into the bus and randomly selected a seat. Most people do not check their seats numbers because the rides are not that long.

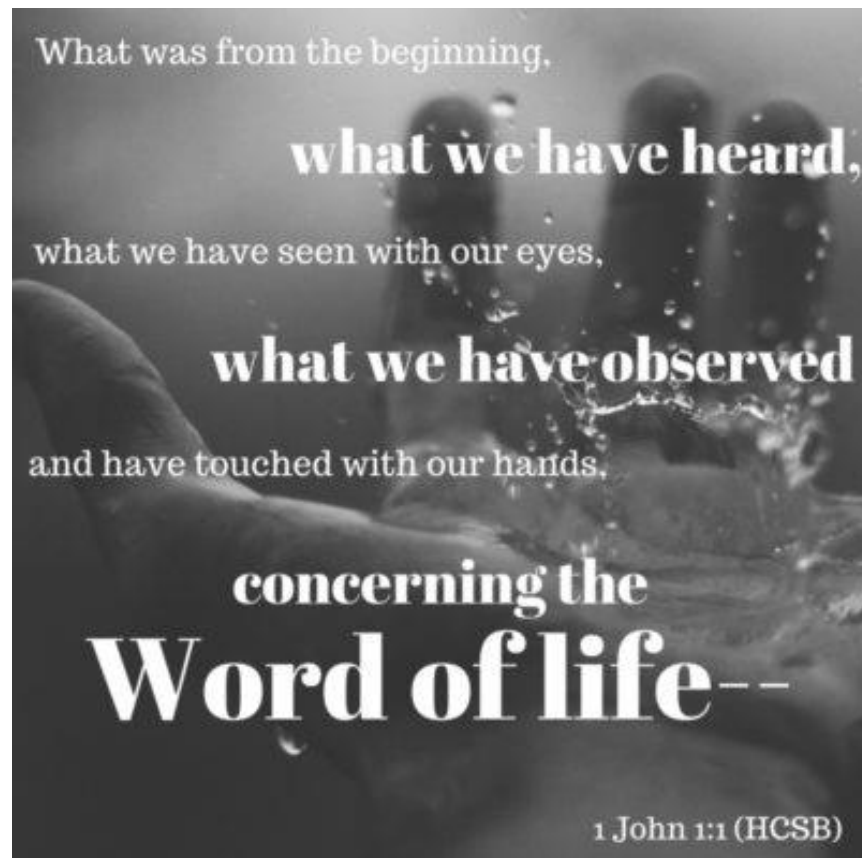
After a few minutes another lady came and was looking at her ticket to see what seat was hers. Of course, my mom was sitting in her seat. Mom tried to explain that there are plenty seats and it does not really matter where you sit. The lady thought differently. Rather than get into a conflict, my mother moved to another seat.

About half through the trip there was a big tumult and confusion. Come to find out -- the lady who insisted on sitting in that seat was on the wrong bus. My mom had to chuckle and I did too when she told me the story.

Isn't that the case in our lives. We get so focused on the little details that we forget the big picture. We get into big arguments about little things and want to be so right about little details that we forget to notice that we are going in the wrong direction.

During the Christmas season we can be so focused on getting things right -- purchase the right the gifts, cook the perfect meals, wear the prettiest clothes -- that we do not stop to see if we totally missed the direction of our lives. We forgot why we are doing all of this and what is the reason for the season.

Do you and I get distracted by having the right seat instead of making sure we are the right bus? Let us continually make sure our bus is taking us to eternal life.



John starts his first letter with "what was from the beginning." John steps back to see a big picture. In the beginning was the "Word of Life". The Gospel of John starts with "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." John continues a few sentences later in the Gospel, "The Word became flesh,

and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” So we know that Jesus is the Word.

Why did John call Jesus the Word? Jesus reveals to us the mind and heart of God. Jesus is the living means of communication between us and God. He is God’s Word to us. God has spoken and continues to speak to us through Jesus. Jesus is how God opted to communicate to us. I use words to communicate with you today. God chooses Jesus to communicate with us. Jesus is the final and complete revelation of God. He is God. God, in the person of Jesus Christ, became human and to save a broken sinful world.

John proclaims that he is not talking about something abstract or about an invisible God. We saw this Word with our own eyes. We heard the Word with our own ears. We felt it. We touched this eternal Word of Life. With all of our senses, we witness that it is true!

The Bible gives us eyewitness accounts. They are not legends. Let’s check not little things in our lives, but let’s; check the very basic foundations of truth we hear and believe. John says: I saw it, I heard it, I touched it. It is not a made up story. It is not an idea. It is a fact. The Christmas story is a fact of God’s incarnation. Jesus is God and came as a human. How much can you believe of what somebody tells you? Can you trust the source?

When our son, Wesley, was smaller, he would come to us and say that he could not go into that dark room. We would ask why? Wesley would say there are monsters... Well, one thing for sure, he heard somebody tell him and it was enough for him to believe it. He applied it very well to his life. Wesley applied somebody’s misinformation to his life.

At this point you can ask, if I believe the Christmas story is true, how do I apply to my life?

There are many dark rooms to enter. The future is uncertain. We face surgery. Our problems overwhelm us. Hate and sin lurk everywhere. What monsters do you fear in those dark rooms of life? They are real to us. We allow those fears to consume us.

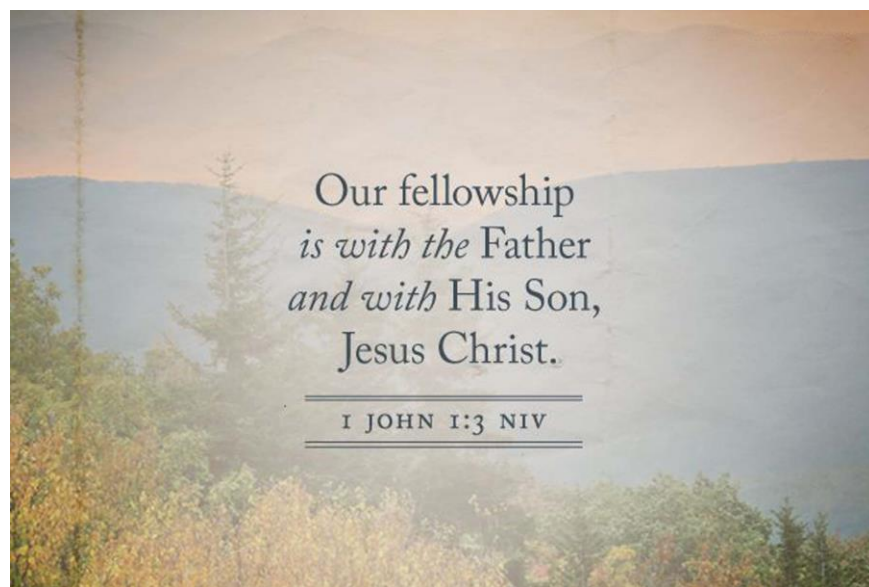
As the Christmas carol reminds us: The hope and fears of all the years were met in Bethlehem that night.

Wesley would enter the room without fear if we held his hand. We can live without fear of any monsters because of Christmas. God is with us. Immanuel. We can claim Psalm 23: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.” Jesus faced death and all the fury of hell. He is alive and walks with us holding our hand.

We cannot move forward till we establish what is true to us in our lives.

Many people love what Jesus said and did. They are happy to leave it at that. To them it is irrelevant if all those stories about Jesus are real or not. It is the concepts that count. The truth is that Jesus is more than a good teacher, miracle worker or great prophet. Jesus is the Son of the living God. He is the Word made flesh.

Some will say that what matters is you are a good person. However, as Paul reminds us over and over, being good is not enough. We are saved by faith. By the grace of God, Jesus Christ came to earth, lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died. We believe what John saw. We believe in His witness and our lives are not same.



In verse 3 John explains why this truth is so important and why he is writing this letter. So people can come to have a personal relationship with the Father and with the Son and so we can have healthy relationships with one another based on a correct understanding of Jesus.

I have seen and experienced many times unhealthy relationships between husband and wife. How many times, we wives treat our husbands as children. How many times do we take a role of mothers? How many times do we try to change our spouse when in reality it is us who needs to change?

There is a movie called "Talladega Nights". In one scene the family gathers for a meal and Ricky Bobby says the prayer before the meal. "*Dear Lord Baby Jesus...*"

His wife interrupts: "*Hey, you know, sweetie, Jesus did grow up.*"

Ricky replies, "*Well, I like the Christmas Jesus best and I'm saying grace.*"

Ricky starts the prayer again, "*Dear tiny Jesus, in your golden fleece diapers, with your tiny, little, fat, balled up fists.*"

We all need to grow and mature in understanding who God is so we can have a mature relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ?

The only way to enter into personal relationship with God is through Jesus. God made a way for us to be reunited with Him. He came down and took on flesh so that He could become the perfect and final blood sacrifice for us. Romans 4:25 explains that Jesus "...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

Why did Jesus come to earth? Why do we celebrate with all the trappings? it is because we can have a growing relationship with Jesus, and we can have a restored relationship with God.

The key word in this verse is FELLOWSHIP. The Greek word, *koinonia*, means "to share, or to have something in common." It's not enough for John to be experiencing this life himself; he wants others to share the experience with him. In fact, he wants it so badly that his own experience is incomplete without them.

Jesus became one of us, so we can have a right relationship with God. He learned and lived our lives so we can have a relationship with God. Jesus says, I want a fellowship with you. I do not want to be an idea or a good story that you might apply something into your life because you feel it is good.

That is where we come to today's point. If you have not experienced Christ born in your heart, you are called to welcome him into your life. If you already believe in what happened in Christmas, you are called to grow in that relationship with Jesus. He is in you, through the Holy Spirit. He is a living Savior. John is saying the experience of the Living Word is not restricted to the first disciples. You can also know Jesus.

It is a growing experience. Do not give up if you do not hear Jesus speaking to you. Do not give up if you do not see or feel him. John wrote his letter so we can have fellowship with one another as well as with God. We need the encouragement of each other to mature in our knowledge of and experience of God.

John wrote this letter to the first century Christians in Asia Minor. They faced several challenges in their faith. One was that they disagreed with each other. They were not united. John's remedy: share the real experience of God the Father through Jesus the Son. In other words, have fellowship.



Look at verse 4: "We write this to make our joy complete." That's a very interesting statement. If he had said, "We write this to make *your* joy complete," that would make sense. He wants his readers to have the same joy he had experienced. In fact, there are some ancient manuscripts that have the word "your" instead of "our," probably because that made more sense to some of the copyists. But "our joy" is probably the most reliable reading. John wants his readers and us to understand that his own experience with Christ will be lacking something unless and until he can share that experience with others.

In John 15 Jesus said, "I have given you all these teaching so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be full and complete."

There is no other deeper and lasting joy: joy that does not depend on your circumstances, joy that nothing can take away. Yes, it is possible to know joy even when you are encounter monsters in a dark room: anxiety, fear, sorrows, loneliness, physical challenges, disappointment, stress.

John is saying you cannot have joy if you do not give it away. Joy is the second fruit of the Spirit.

Just as love is not love until you give it away, so too joy and all the fruit of the spirit will not happen until you share them with someone. Your joy does not depend on other people's reception. You have joy by giving it away.

Joy is not optional. It comes with the package of believing in Christ and having a right relationship with God. It comes when we are focused less on what seat we have, but more on what bus we are on. Christmas is not over. Joy is not over.

Joy to the World, the Lord is come. Repeat, repeat the sounding joy!