

Christ is Coming: Leap for Joy
Luke 1:39-45

This is the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. We have been preparing ourselves to celebrate the coming of Christ on Christmas, as well as preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ at the end of this present age.

It turns out that one of the things we need to do to prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ is to exercise our leaping for joy muscles.

John the Baptist told people to prepare for the coming of Christ by repenting, changing the way they were living, becoming people of good will. But John's first response to the coming of Christ was to leap for joy.

John first encountered Christ before either of them were born, when Mary pregnant with Jesus, went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John. When Mary greeted Elizabeth John leapt for joy in the womb.

Leaping for joy is an entirely appropriate response to the coming of Christ. Because Christ has come, we have fellowship with God, who is the source of all that is good.

Have you ever wondered what the world would be like if Christ hadn't come? I don't have to wonder. I can remember what life was like before Christ came into my world.

For the first twenty years of my life, God was a stranger to me. I hungered for God. But God was far off in the heavens. Although I went to church and believed Christ was the Son of God, what that meant to me was that Christ was the best man and the wisest teacher who ever lived. It wasn't until I bowed down before Christ and called him my Lord and my God that I found fellowship with God. It was through Christ that I came to know God.

And it was through Christ that we come to understand God. We say that God is love. How do we know that? The God who dwells in the heavens is beyond our comprehension. We can't know whether that God cares a thing about us. And yet we do know that God loves us. How? Because in Christ God came to be with us and care for us. God came to suffer and die for us. We understand God because in Christ we know God.

Because Christ has come, God is no longer a stranger to us.

Let me tell you about a boy whose father was a soldier. This was during World War II. His father left for the war when the boy was three years old. He was gone for three years. Soon the boy couldn't even remember his father. At Christmas and on his birthdays, he would get a package with a toy truck and a card. His mother would read the card and tell him the truck was from his father and that his father said that he loved him. But the boy didn't really believe his father loved him. If he did, why didn't he ever come home? In his mind, his father was a make-believe character. He didn't even really believe he existed.

Then one day, the front door suddenly opened, and there was a strange man standing there. His mother screamed and ran to him and threw her arms around him. She started laughing and crying, all at the same time. Finally, when she quieted down, the man looked around until he saw the boy, and he said, "Son, I'm home. Come give your father a hug." But the little boy was frightened by this tall stranger who made his mother cry. He ran out into the backyard and sat down on the ground in the dirt and began playing with his toy trucks. After a few moments the strange man came out and went over to him. He sat down in the dirt beside him. The little boy

said, "If you're really my father, why didn't you come home?" The man said, "I'm here now, and I'll never leave you alone again." Then he pulled another toy truck out of his pocket and put it down beside the others and he began playing with the truck. When the boy saw him playing with the truck, he suddenly remembered why he loved trucks so much. He remembered his father used to sit in the dirt with him and they would play with the trucks together. He realized that his father really was real and not make believe. This really was his father. He really did love him. He was home, and he would never leave again. Everything was all right. He stood up and walked over to his father and laid his head on his shoulder. Then he let out a whoop and went running to his mother who had been standing there at the door watching them, and he screamed, "Momma, daddy's home!"

God is no longer a stranger to us, because at Christmas God came and sat down in the dirt with us.

You know that in the Jewish Temple, the Holy of Holies, the place where the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, was housed, there was a curtain that separated the presence of God from the people of God. That curtain was a powerful statement. It said that even those who worshipped God and sought God out could not enter into the presence of God. Now, imagine the reaction if a man walked out from behind the curtain and announced, "I have come to be with you."

To say that God came to us in the flesh is such an astounding assertion that I sometimes find myself asking, "Is that what we Christians really believe?" And the answer is, "Yes, that is really what we believe."

The eternal God, who is the source and sustainer of all that is, who is beyond our knowing and understanding, incomprehensible to us, for whom the entire history of creation is like the blink of an eye, for whom the boundless universe is like a grain of sand, this God cares so much about us that God was willing to become one of us, to become a baby born in the most humble of circumstances.

Without the coming of Christ, we have a God who is distant and does not love us enough to set aside divine dignity and come down from the throne to be with us. Such a God would be hard to believe in and even harder to love.

The message of Christmas is that our God is real. Our God really does love us. Our God has come to us. Our God is here with us, and we will never again be left alone. Everything will be all right.

Is it any wonder that we leap for joy at Christmas? It is the season to be jolly. Christmas is a day of great joy. Our God has come to us as one of us. The One who dwells in the highest heavens, the One who dwells in the deepest recesses of our hearts, beyond our understanding or comprehension, has come to us as a simple baby. This child is the embodiment of God's love for us. This is Emmanuel—God With Us.

Leap for joy. The Son of God has come to reach out in love and compassion to humanity. He came to lift up the lowly and to remind the high and mighty to bow down before true greatness and power. He came to give light to the blind, to give warmth to the cold, to give hope to those in despair.

When the shepherds looked on this baby, they knew they were in the Presence of God, and they knelt in awe and amazement. Even the animals understood in their primitive manner that this was their creator. Wise Men were overwhelmed and struck dumb in his presence, offering gifts that paled before his glory.

Leap for joy. The Son of Mary came to remind us that we mortals were created to fellowship with God. In him the division between heaven and earth was erased and those who dwell in heaven and on earth were brought together in an eternal chorus of praise to the One who is the Source of all that is, the only One worthy of worship and adoration.

I know the questions that arise when we talk about God coming to us in the flesh. There is a time to examine those questions. But Christmas is not the time.

At Christmas set aside all doubts and questions. Put away your fears. Throw open the door to eternity and look deeply therein, and see that eternity is not a bottomless, empty chasm of darkness, but an unbounded and endless flow of love, which is generously poured out on us all.

Kneel before the Christ child and know that our God is real, that our God loves us, that our God is with us and will never leave us. Know in your hearts of hearts that all is well, because our Savior is coming.

Leap for joy. Celebrate with abandon. Shout the good news.

Rejoice! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, comes to us!

Dr. Wesley Welborn
Senior Pastor