

GOD'S MESSAGE OF HOPE

DECEMBER 17, 2023

WORSHIP

Emmanuel God With Us,
Praise Him Forever, O Come
All Ye Faithful, Hope Has A
Name

WELCOME

What are you looking
forward to doing, or being
with the most
this Christmas?

WORD

LUKE 1:13-17

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 give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 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 while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. 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."

John 1:26-29

John answered them, saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, of whom I am not worthy even to untie the strap of His sandal." These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing people. The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

When we get what we hoped to buy for ourselves or our loved ones, we feel a certain amount of happiness. It makes us happy when we get to do something with people we like to be with. But have you noticed that sooner or later, the happiness fades, and a certain amount of sadness takes over. You see, nothing that we hope for in this world truly satisfies. But the great news is, God's message of hope for us this Christmas will forever bring joy and peace in our lives!

1. GOD'S MESSENGER

This message of hope was introduced to God's people in Israel 2,000 years ago by God's messenger, John the Baptist. Before John appeared on the scene, there was 400 years of silence from God after He spoke through the Old Testament prophet Malachi. During this period, Israel has been conquered by Rome and they were waiting for their Messiah, and there was someone who was going to prepare the way for Him to arrive. Can you imagine what 400 years of waiting was like for God's people? Today, it seems that we are also waiting for things to be better. Times are tougher, and values are eroding; the world seems to be going mad. It was a very similar time in that sense, and people were hungry, looking everywhere else for the answer. Today, we look to shopping, watching endless movies and TV series online, for meaning and answers.

Malachi 4:5-6 gives a prophecy that God will send the prophet Elijah to "turn the fathers back to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" and Israel was waiting for this to happen. When family relationships have eroded, you know that something's wrong in society. We see that today, and isn't it nice if there was someone who can turn back the hearts of family members back together? So back then, the Israelites were waiting, and would even save a seat or a cup of wine at Passover for Elijah! That's how much they anticipated the coming Messenger.

John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth were both righteous in the sight of God (**Luke 1:5-6**). Parents have a huge impact on their children's future for generations. John had great parents! God, through an angel told Zechariah what to name their son, and that John was going to be: filled with the Holy Spirit, will bring joy and gladness and that he will be great in God's eyes.

Jesus himself described John as "the greatest among all (human) prophets" (**Matthew 11:11**). But how was John the Baptist described in the Bible? He wore simple clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt and ate locusts and wild honey (**Matthew 3:4-5**). Greatness is not what we normally think it is.

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John was also “set apart” (a Nazarite) for God, not drinking any wine or liquor he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v.15). If we want to serve God, at times, we must deny ourselves certain things that are not necessarily bad (like hobbies), for the sake of doing more for the kingdom. God used John to turn many back to Himself—it wasn’t John who turned people’s hearts, but the Spirit working through John (vv.16-17). The same Holy Spirit that enabled Elijah to do great things for the Lord, is the same Spirit that was going to fill John the Baptist. This was how the prophecy about “Elijah” coming back was fulfilled. John was a forerunner who turned hearts back to the Lord. Wouldn’t you want to do the same?

2. GOD'S MESSAGE

Through his message, John would tell people to “repent” (Matthew 3:1-3, 7); he was not afraid to speak the truth. Are we afraid to speak the truth today? No one wants to be “cancelled”. There’s a lot of online hate, so we are so worried about speaking truth. But what does God want us to say? We have to say the truth for the right reasons. Being angry is not the right reason to speak the truth. When we speak the truth in anger, people don’t hear truth, they hear anger. We must speak the truth in love.

John’s life pointed people to JESUS. **John 3:28-30** show us that his focus was all about JESUS. Are we more focused on ourselves? How can we increase Christ’s esteem in our lives? There’s no one greater that we can care to lift up than Jesus Christ. God’s message of hope is Jesus Christ (**John 1:29**). This message was not just for people 2,000 years ago, or for the person sitting beside you.

We all have to remember how wonderful and personal God is. God has time to be with you even if there are 8+ billion people in the world. God loves you, and you are the person that God will still come to take away your sin. **Mark 1:1-2** and **Isaiah 40:3-5** tell us that John the Baptist was to prepare God’s way (remove mountains, fill up the valleys) so that His glory will be revealed to us. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” was John’s message. To repent is to change one’s mind or heart about ourselves and Christ. Realize that we are doomed because of sin; nothing we do can ever be enough to save us from our sins. Second, we need to know that Jesus is our only hope; my God who loves me and died for me to redeem me (**Romans 6:23**). Repentance does not save us, but it leads to salvation (**2 Corinthians 7:10**, **Ephesians 2:8-9**, **Titus 3:4-6**). Like John, we don’t have to be perfect messengers (**Matthew 11:2-5**), but in Christ, all of us can point people to Jesus (**Luke 1:76-79**, **Acts 1:8**). Every day, every minute, you are proclaiming a message. Whose heart will you prepare today to receive Jesus by your words and deeds? Let us be God’s Spirit-filled messengers this Christmas!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Leaders: Please choose questions that are appropriate to the level of spiritual maturity of your members)

1. Self-Check.

What is hindering you or has hindered you from being a messenger of Jesus?

2. Setting It Right.

What do you need to set apart in your life to be God’s messenger?

3. Living It Out.

Who will you commit to share Jesus to this Christmas?

WORKS

PRAY CARE SHARE IN ACTION

Pray for God’s message of hope to penetrate the hearts and minds of people everywhere. Share the true meaning of Christmas to family and friends and center your celebration around Christ. Take every opportunity to not only share material gifts, but God’s gift of salvation given through Christ!

WEEKLY PRAYER POINTS

I. Thanksgiving

- Worship God for who He is, what He has done, and what He will do in our lives

II. Country and the World

- Upright and moral governance of public servants; repentance and salvation for government leaders and citizens for a Christ-centered Philippines.
- God’s provision for families deeply affected by inflation.
- War in Ukraine to end, loss of lives prevented; escalating tension in East Asian countries to stop.
- God’s protection for His chosen people- Israel.

III. Church

- That CCF Members would honor and love God and make disciples.
- Elders, pastors, deacons, and families (holy, humble, harmonious, happy, heart-working).

- Ministries and churches expansion worldwide.

IV. CCFE Facilities

- Worship and Training Center
- Training and Shelter

V. Personal Concerns

- Deeper intimate relationship with God.
- Righteous living.
- Salvation of family and friends.

MEMORY VERSE

JOHN 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”