

CHRISTMAS EXTRAVAGANZA
TITUS 3:4-8

Joy at Christmas

What makes you happy at Christmas?

- Presents – we all enjoy getting presents and there is the joy of giving them to other people, seeing someone's eyes light up when you give them just the present they've always wanted and they're really happy.
- Christmas dinner – we enjoy the food we eat; we also enjoy the people who are round the table with us and the time we spend with the people we love, and we perhaps enjoy that as much as the food itself at times; some of us will have Christmas dinner on our own and that by choice and we are quite content with that!
- Cards and letters: it is a time to catch up with people we've not heard from since last Christmas; cards and sometimes letters will tell you all their news, sometimes in a bit too much detail, if we're honest, but it is good to hear how our friends are getting on, seeing some pictures too perhaps. We put the cards on display to make the house or the flat look brighter!
- Does Church make us happy at Christmas? I hope that it does, as we sing carols - and the word "carol" started off as a dance and people are happy to dance; dancing is a way of expressing joy – most of the carols we sing are happy songs; some are quiet and reflective, but I don't think any are sad songs!

In spelling "Jesus" we chose "joy" to begin to spell His name! Jesus brings joy at Christmas. Mary was full of joy at the thought of her son: "*My soul...*" (*Luke 1:46f*) she sang; I'm sure there were days when she was like every other mum, tired and uncomfortable, but in her heart she saw something of the joy that God would bring to world through her son.

Joseph was full of joy at the idea of his son being God's Saviour; he was convinced that everything would be good, that Jesus would be "Immanuel – God with us" and that would be a good thing for Joseph and for the world. He was glad to be involved in this great story.

The shepherds were bouncing! Once they got past their initial fears about angels appearing in the sky and how traumatic that must have been, off they ran to Bethlehem to see Jesus, the new born king. They were full of excitement and joy, not just the joy that everybody has to see a new baby, but something of who this baby is filled their hearts and off they went, bouncing, running to Bethlehem. Then on the way home, after they has seen Jesus, they couldn't contain themselves, telling everybody they met about this child, they were so excited!

The Wise men were perhaps a bit more restrained; their joy was seen as they knelt before Jesus and offered their worship and their gifts; their joy was tinged with fear, not sure how to deal with Herod, suspicious of him and rightly so! But they were glad that their journey had been good, had been the right thing to do.

Joy at Christmas is not just at the baby, but at what His coming means for us. Here are some very good ideas that are at the heart of what was going on when Jesus was born: "*When the...*" (*Titus 3:4f*) How good are these words? Kindness, love, generosity, grace, hope – that's a great selection box of ideas to change the world and to make our lives better. All of this is what God was doing when Jesus came: He was being kind to the world; He was giving love to the world; He was holding nothing back and being generous in His giving; He was doing this for us with grace in His heart because we don't really deserve any of this; all of these other words lead us to hope, to the hope of a new kind of life, the hope of heaven. These gifts that God has given us are the deepest reason for our joy at Christmas and as God has been kind, loving and generous to us, so we are to be kind, loving and generous to other people.

Not everybody is happy at Christmas; we know that. Some people are sad at Christmas because people they remember or people who are sick, but even then we can say "thank you" to God for His kindness, His love, His generosity, His grace and the hope that all of this brings.