

A True Joy- Filled Christmas

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In modern times, Christmas has become synonymous with busyness and stress. There is the exhaustive search for the perfect gifts. There are the hours of holiday baking and cooking. Then, there is the frequent holiday over-eating and holiday weight gain. There is the idea that this year the home and table would be perfectly decorated for all visitors to marvel over. There is the dream of having a Christmas in which there is no conflict and all families members would visit with one another in harmony. There are expectations both spoken and unspoken that this Christmas would surpass all others if only...This stress and high expectations are in such sharp contrast to the first Christmas. With the first Christmas, there was much excitement, anticipation and joy.

In the Gospel of Luke, we read that over 2000 years ago, the angel Gabriel visited Zechariah as he was performing his priestly duties in the temple. Gabriel told Zechariah that his wife, Elizabeth, would give birth to a son. The couple was to name the boy John. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth. He would be given the privilege of preparing the way for the coming of the Lord. When Elizabeth learned she was pregnant, even though she was along in years, she was overjoyed with such a wonderful blessing.

When Elizabeth was in her sixth month, the angel Gabriel visited Elizabeth's relative, Mary. Mary was a young teenage girl that was pledged to be married to Joseph. Gabriel told Mary that she had found favor with God and would be with child. The child born to her would be the Son of the God. Although puzzled by how this would come to pass, Mary was willing to be used by God in such a way. She found herself humbled and filled with joy.

In excitement, Mary hurried to see her relative, Elizabeth. At their greeting, baby John leaped in Elizabeth's womb. He too was overjoyed with being in the presence of the Christ Child. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and then returned home.

Shortly before Mary was to give birth, she and Joseph went to Bethlehem in order to be counted for the census. While in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to Jesus. There was much excitement in heaven. An angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds that were living out in the fields and told them of the good news that the Christ Child had been born and told them where to find the child. With much excitement and anticipation, the shepherds went to find the Christ Child. Once they found the Lord, the shepherds left and spread the news of what they had seen and heard. Later, the shepherds returned to glorify and praise God.

The first Christmas was so pure, so simple and joy filled. I believe this is what the Lord would have for us. Although it is not sinful to look for special gifts, make scrumptious treats, decorate the home in holiday splendor, and hope that family time would be

harmonious, the Lord does not have check lists for us, nor does He want us to live by check lists. He just simply wants us to live with Him in joy.