

Joy to the World

My wife, Shirley, and I still don't have a Christmas Tree. We are trying to decide if we want an artificial tree or a live tree.

I went the other day to a tree lot trying to find just the right tree that could make our house look just right.

The tree I am looking for needs to have just the right angle on the top for our angel to sit up there, it need to be really full with the proper slope coming down, perfect green color without any brown on it, not leaning to the right or the left. You know – just the proper tree to bring joy into our house.

While I was out there looking at the tree lot, I ran into this nice older lady and we got to talking. I was sharing with her how I had been looking at all of these trees and how hard of I time I was having finding “just the right tree that I needed to make our house beautiful.”

She looked up at me and said, “I won't have any trouble finding a tree. I don't look for the one I need, but I look for the one that needs me. The tree that I can take home and make beautiful.”

The Bible tells us it is better to give than to receive. What a great Joy it is to give. And I am not just talking about presents. During this season, sure we think about presents, but we can give so much more than presents.

We can give a piece of us. A warm hug to a friend or loved one, wishing someone a Merry Christmas from your heart, going out of our way to do something special for someone.

These simple acts can bring great joy into someone else's heart and our own.

That is what today's message is about - Joy.

As today is the third Sunday in Advent, the service is based on the theme of Joy.

Even today's music is about Joy.

Whenever I see the song "Joy to The World" listed in a bulletin, for some reason I always think of the Seventies group, "Three Dog Night."

"Joy to the World, All the Boy and Girls, Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea, joy to you and me."

I realize that version of "Joy to The World" isn't the one we sing in church, but the chorus does say it all – Joy is available to everyone – to the World.

Now, the scripture that Al read for us was about John the Baptizer – and at first we really don't see a message of Joy in that scripture.

See John was out there in the Jordan River baptizing people before Jesus started his ministry. John was proclaiming that everyone needs to repent of their sins to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

Like I said, it doesn't sound overly Joyful – especially where he called them a bunch of snakes. These guys called Pharisees showed up to get baptized, "just in case." But see, these Pharisees didn't really repent, they were all about just showing how good they could go through the motions. (*Theatrically*) "See How Good I am, I got Baptized."

It should have been more than just going through the motions for them. Their hearts weren't in it. They just wanted to show they were good, but they really didn't mean it.

So John's message was really aimed at those Pharisees back then.
(INSERT Skit Here)

So yes, John's message was for those in Jesus' time, but for us also.

In our hearts we have to look towards God.

Having a relationship with God is so much more than just going through the motions. It is so much more than just "appearing" to be good on the surface.

Having a relationship with God begins in our hearts. Where we start believing in him, and trusting in Him.

I know I say this a lot, but God does want to have a relationship with us. Each one of us individually.

He has taken the first step in that relationship. And yes, we come to church on Sundays, we help the needy, we even pray in a group for one another. But, what is in our hearts?

Do we remember to give thanks to God for our loved ones? Do we tell God we are sorry for sinning and then try not to repeat our sin? Do we try to follow the example Jesus set for us?

And that is the message that John the Baptizer has for us – What is in our hearts?

It is a good message. Knowing we are right with God brings such Joy to our lives.

Oprah Winfrey defined Joy as "a sustained sense of well-being and internal peace - a connection to what matters."

I don't think any pastor could have defined it better. "A sustained sense of well-being and internal peace - a connection to what matters."

Christmas Season is a time for Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. All because of this small child born to a virgin named Mary.

Next Sunday morning we are going to look at Mary and see why God chose her, a young woman to be the mother of the Christ Child, the Mother of God. And we will look at the type of Love God has for us.

As the Bible tells us, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

But that is next week. This week I want everyone to reflect on the Hope we have as believers of an everlasting life.

Think of the Peace we can have in our hearts today by accepting God into our lives and trusting in Him more and trusting in ourselves less.

And what a wonderful Joy we can have in our lives when we remember that it is better to give than to receive.