

**CHRISTMAS COUNSELING**

**LUKE 2:8-20**

# **THE BIRTH OF JOY**



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**FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

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# INTRODUCTION

In my early twenties, I was involved (in a small way) in the launch of an innovative investment product. The financial services company I worked for in Scotland entered the Capital Investment Bond market rather late and realized that they needed extraordinary marketing if we were to get any slice of that business. The marketing geniuses devised a strategy that resulted in an incredibly successful CIB launch with record amounts invested. Their strategy centered on five factors:

- **Timing:** They kept all the details back until launch day but dropped lots of hints and teasers in the pre-launch advertising with three colored boxes appearing everywhere (blue, green, pink)
- **Location:** They chose Gleneagles Hotel for the launch, the most prestigious hotel in Scotland
- **Influencers:** Every Financial Consultant was allowed to bring their three most profitable agents so that they would generate credibility and spread the word.
- **Branding:** We entered an incredibly complex world of investment bonds with what was then a uniquely simple brand with three color coded funds: Safety (blue), Growth (green), Opportunity (pink).
- **Slogan:** I can't actually remember the slogan we used but I do remember the discussions centered around maximizing the promise without over-promising.

As I said at the beginning, it was one of the most successful launches ever with the marketing people winning several industry awards and accolades.

Which raises a question: **Why did God choose the worst ever marketing for the best ever message?** You might ask, "How can I say that? In Luke 2:8-20, we see how the worst marketing campaign was the best salvation campaign

# BACKGROUND

Our series on Christmas counseling has explained how the Christmas story can change our emotional story. The Christmas story of hope, peace, and love can give us hope instead of despair peace instead of anxiety, and love instead of lovelessness and loneliness. Today we'll see how the Christmas story counsels us towards joy instead of sadness and depression.



What was so bad about the Gospel's marketing?



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# 1. THIS IS THE WORST MARKETING CAMPAIGN

**The worst timing.** Timing is everything in marketing. For example, you're not going to sell many bathing suits in December no matter how good they are. It would be the wrong time. Yet God chose one of the worst times in Israel's history to launch Jesus into the world. It was a humiliating time as the nation was under Roman subjugation and the people had given up hope of deliverance. It was an unexpected time, because although God had dropped many hints of a coming Savior in the Old Testament, he had been silent for 400 years and few had any expectancy of a Savior. There were no hints that this was night was going to be anything different when the angels suddenly appeared above the shepherds.

**The worst location.** Bethlehem was one of the most despised places in the nation. Five miles from prestigious Jerusalem, it lived in its shadow. In Micah 5:2, we're told it was such a small and insignificant village that it didn't even have enough people to make a clan or make the normal lists of Israel's cities.

**The worst influencers.** If we were choosing influencers to get our message out, we would have chosen the Roman military first, the royal family second, and the Jewish religious establishment third. The last people we would have chosen would have been shepherds. They had no influence, they were not movers and shakers, they were not up and coming. They were uneducated, unskilled, underpaid, unwelcome, unclean, untrustworthy, and outside. Yet God chose the lowest of the low with the greatest announcement.

**The worst brand.** "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." That's your brand? A poor baby in poor cloth in a poor stable in a poor trough? Really? No crown, no robes, no gold-plated crib. That's your "sign"? Your logo? That's how you want to be thought of?

**The worst slogan.** With all that's gone before, we're expecting a downbeat understated slogan. Yet what we get is such a contrast with all that's happened so far. "Good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Talk about over-promising! It's like selling a donkey by calling it "The Fastest Way to Travel." It's like putting a picture of snow-bombed West Michigan under the line "Sun and Fun." Great news of Great Joy for Great Numbers" looks like the least credible slogan anyone could think of. It looks nothing like great news, great joy, or great numbers.

## CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

**God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).** God doesn't do things the way we would do them. He doesn't think in the same way we think. He doesn't judge the way we judge or work the way we work (Luke 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

**God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).** God's anti-marketing because he's pro-faith. He doesn't want us won by worldly methods and manipulation but by faith in his Word and ways. He chose this approach to ensure that our faith stands in the power of God not the power of man (1 Cor. 2:5), so that no human being gets any credit but only him (1 Cor. 1:29), and to change the way the world thinks.

GOD IS A SAVIOR NOT A SALESMAN,  
JESUS IS THE MESSIAH NOT A MARKETER



How is this the best salvation campaign?



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## 2. THE BEST SALVATION CAMPAIGN

How is the greatest salvation communicated in such a way that it promotes great joy to great numbers?

**The joy of waiting ended.** God had delivered his people many times in the past: from sinful enemies, sinful situations, and even some of sin's consequences, but not from sin itself. But the long-awaited day of salvation had now arrived: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior." What joy!

**The joy of the Word confirmed.** God had frequently promised a Savior and salvation in the Old Testament. The wait for that oft-promised salvation had been long (4000 years long) and spiritually testing. "Did God lie? Did God mean what he said? Has God forgotten? Can we trust God's Word?" All these questions were answered with this Word confirming Promise-fulfilling announcement. What joy!

**The joy of world blessing.** Although this was announced to Jewish shepherds in a Jewish town with Jewish vocabulary. Yet, God also made crystal clear that salvation was now moving beyond the boundaries of his chosen people to all people. "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." What joy!

**The joy of wrath satisfied.** God's wrath was revealed frequently throughout the Old Testament. His anger was much more prominent than his mercy. If there was one thing the Old Testament accomplished, it was that people knew they were under God's angry judgment and would face even worse when they died. But here God announces a special Savior who would save by taking and exhausting God's anger until none was left for his people to suffer. What joy!

**The joy of washing provided.** As we saw a couple of weeks ago when looking at the meaning of 'Jesus,' 'Savior' did not only mean to be saved from sin's punishment but from sin itself. God's people would have the happiness of sins washed out of their heart and the happiness of holiness in its place. What joy!

**The joy of the weak invited.** Just in case the lowly shepherds thought they were not included in this announcement, or that they were only the messengers of it to others more deserving, the angel said, "For unto YOU is born this day!" You! Yes, you! Yes, you too! What joy!

**The joy of worry over.** For centuries people had worried about how much longer they had to wait, why the promises went unfulfilled, why God's curse on the world was ongoing, how they could ever escape God's wrath and their own sinful habits. Now, all these worries were over. "Fear not!" What joy!

### CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

**God wants you to have joy through salvation.** God gives great joy to great numbers and gets great joy when anyone has great joy in his great gifts and especially his greatest gift of salvation. God is not a kill-joy but a creator of joy.

**The joy of salvation endures when every other evaporates.** We can lose our health, friends, loved ones, money, mobility, jobs, freedom, everything, but still find joy in salvation, a joy which can increase as we age, and which will enter a whole new dimension when we die.

SALVATION IS CELEBRATION  
JESUS IS JOY



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



## SUMMARY



## CHRISTMAS COUNSELING

**Enjoy the deepest joy this Christmas.** Take time to remember the joy of the Word kept, waiting over, world blessing, wrath satisfied, washing provided, the weak invited, and worry over. Whatever other joys you have, get these joys. Whatever joys you lack, get these joys.

**Enjoy God's "anti-marketing".** God chose anti-marketing because he was pro-sinner. He chose the best method and the best messengers for the best message.

**Enjoy being a joy-giver.** Just as God enjoyed announcing the joy of Jesus to the world, get joy by proclaiming the joy of Jesus this Christmas season.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you are our greatest joy, our deepest joy, our longest joy, our best joy, our forever joy. Give me your joy and more joy so that I can give your joy to others.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you market salvation if you were an advertising executive?
2. In what other ways did God choose "anti-marketing" to get his message out?
3. Why did God choose anti-marketing and how does it help us?
4. Which of the joys under "The Best Salvation Campaign" is your greatest joy?
5. What other joys do you find in salvation?
6. Who needs this joy in your life and how will you get it to them?

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