

#3 – JOY TO THE WORLD (Izwe Nkosi)¹

- Where have you seen God at work in your life this week? (Share any brief examples and encouragements).
- Was there anything from Sunday’s message which you found particularly inspiring or challenging?
- Was there anything else you particularly noticed?

Luke 1:11-14 [Zechariah and Elizabeth’s Story]

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a **joy** and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth...

Luke 1:26-31 [Mary’s Story]

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, ‘**Greetings**, you who are highly **favoured!** The Lord is with you.’

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found **favour** with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

Luke 2:8-11 [The Shepherds Story]

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great **joy** for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

Zechariah, Mary, and the Bethlehem shepherds each have an encounter with ‘an angel of the Lord’, Zechariah is ‘startled and gripped with fear’, Mary is ‘greatly troubled’ and the shepherds are ‘terrified’ (the Greek text literally translates as, ‘afraid with a great fear’). But Gabriel (or an unnamed divine messenger in the case of the shepherds) has come to bring a message of **great joy!**

‘Greetings’, says Gabriel to Mary, but the word could also be translated as, ‘Rejoice’. It isn’t so obvious in English, but the Greek word, *chara* (‘joy’) is related to the words meaning ‘greetings’², or ‘rejoice’ (*chairō*), ‘grace’ (*charis*), ‘gift’ (*charisma* – the word we use for the gifts of the Holy Spirit), ‘to bestow favour’ (*charitoo* – which gives us the word ‘charity’), ‘to show favour’, or ‘to give thanks’ (*eucharistēo* – hence the ‘Eucharist’, which is a giving of thanks to God as we partake in God’s greatest gift, Jesus, which we experience in participating in the meal which, depending on which Christian tradition you are familiar with may also be known as the Lord’s Supper, Communion, or the Mass, a word which shouldn’t frighten Protestants, because ‘mass’ derives from the Latin word *missio*, meaning ‘to send’ and from ‘mass’ we have ‘Christmas’, which should always be ‘merry’, that is to say, full of joy!). But this ‘Christmas joy’ doesn’t come out of nowhere; in the book of Isaiah, written in a time of great trouble and upheaval for Israel, the prophet tells of the joy which will characterise the coming of Messiah (Isaiah 42:11; 44:23; 48:20; 49:13; 51:3,11; 52:8-9; 54:1; 55:12; 56:7).

- *These may be difficult and confusing times, but what gives you joy this Christmas?*
- *What are you particularly grateful for right now?*
- *What could we do to ‘bestow favour’ on someone who especially needs it this Christmas?*

Merry Christmas!!

¹ These notes are based only loosely on Izwe’s message, which was brief as is appropriate for a Carol Service!

² You hardly hear it today, but as a schoolboy in the early 70’s the standard greeting to a fellow student was, ‘Wotcher!’, a contraction of ‘what cheer?’ (which could be a question or an exclamation). This was an expression familiar to Shakespeare (see, for example, *The Taming of the Shrew* Act IV, Scene III). We still say, ‘cheers!’ by way of thanks, ‘cheerio’ as we leave; in Germany they say ‘tschuss’, which I suspect shares the same Greek root.