

3 | LUKE 2:1-21

PEACE FOR NOISY SOULS

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Christmas time is a time of hope and celebration, but it can also be a very lonely and painful time for us. It ought to be a time in which we rest and stop and ponder the love of God anew in our lives. Sadly, it is often a time of **busyness**, and instead of feeling God's love, our hearts are **crowded** with worries and distractions.

Worry, anxiousness and even despair can occupy our hearts. God wants Jesus and his peace to occupy the throne of our heart. How do we get there? I want to present a message on this Christmas Eve morning about "Peace for Noisy Souls."

DAVID'S NOISY PIT

David says, in **Psalm 40:1-2**, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. 2 He drew me up from the **pit of destruction**, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure."

The word pit of destruction is literally a pit of "noise, tumult, crashing, or uproar."¹ We all know that "pit of noise" that we came out of. We had noisy hearts – hearts cluttered and crowded with the noise of **anxiety**, **fear**, **anger**, and even **depression** and **despair**. Sometimes as Christians we carry that noise around with us in the Christian life.

What does God do for us? He wants to give you stability. He wants to "draw you up out of the **pit of noise**... and set your feet on a rock, and make your steps secure." That is, He wants to remove you from the pit of noise and establish you in the way of peace and security. Don't you want that?

Scripture Reading

Hear the Word of the Lord. **Luke 2:1-21**, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were **filled with great fear**. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby **wrapped in swaddling cloths** and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹ Cleon Rogers, "2301 נָחַשׁ," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 890.

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." This is God's Word.

1. THE PEOPLE WITH NOISY SOULS (2:8)

ALL OF US LACK PEACE AT TIMES

I'm so glad Jesus is the Prince of peace. All of us lack peace at times. We can have everything going right and still lack peace. Peace cannot be purchased with money. It is the gift of God. God promises "peace that passes understanding." He says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6-7). Easier said than done right? You say, "Pastor, how can I have peace?" I want to tell you but first, let me introduce you to some people who likely had some very noisy hearts.

ALL WHO LABOR

Jesus said to them all, "Come to me, all you who labor" (Mt 11:28). The word labor means "to grow weary, to be beaten out." The root word means *to take a beating*. Most of us identify with that. We have at times felt overwhelmed as if we were in a hurricane with the winds pounding unceasingly against our souls.

MARY

In this passage we meet the young virgin girl named **Mary**. She's probably between 16 and 18 years old. She's so young, but she's pregnant. She's never been with a man, but the rumors are swirling around. Have you ever been misjudged and maligned? It happens. This is on a whole other level.

Think of the journey of Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Let's just imagine this scene. Luke records exactly how it happened.

- Mary is full term in pregnancy.
- It was about a 90-mile journey.
- It is not certain whether or not they had a mule or a donkey for this trip. Even if she was fortunate enough to ride on a donkey, I think all mothers in here would admit that that's probably not the most luxurious way to travel when you are full term. There were no power windows or climate control. No adjustable seat either.
- It's the cold of winter—dust is blowing in the cold wind.
- They're away from family, away from home.

Can you imagine this journey of 90-95 miles? The journey left Mary increasingly weary as she trod those dusty miles to the south, and when she and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem they were exhausted—especially Mary. Then the pains began. Perhaps at first young Mary was not sure it was her time and did not say anything to Joseph. But when there was no doubt that it was the real thing, she told him—probably with tears. Remember, she was at most 16 to 18 years old, but probably younger.²

Yet as amazing as this journey was for Mary, the most amazing journey in the history of the world was happening for someone else.

Mary's Fears

What kind of noise might have been in Mary's soul? What about sounds of anxiety and fear?

Thoughts of **worry** and **fear**: "What if this happens, and what if that happens?"

Thoughts of **vulnerability** and **uncertainty**: "I have no control of this situation." "Does God really care for me?" "I feel like God has abandoned me."

Mary's family likely abandoned her when she got to Bethlehem. "There was no room in the inn" (Lk 2:7). The word "Inn" is *kataluma*, which means "to unloose." It was a guest room – a place to unloose your beast of burden. A place to unloose your sandals. It was better known as a "guest room" or "upper room" away from the animals.

There was "no room" for Mary even though she was pregnant because the family was ashamed and scandalized by her. She was the one who got pregnant before her wedding. What a shame! What a shame. *That girl can give birth among the animals for all I care.* Even if Mary's family didn't care, God cared.

Does God Care?

Often, we mix up the fact that people neglect us and don't care for us and think God doesn't care. You might be asking, does God care about me? The answer is there is no one in the universe that cares more for you. He wants you to live in heaven with him forever.

JESUS IS KNOCKING

Jesus is calling you, bidding you to come to him and let him embrace you and carry you. He is knocking on the door of your heart. Yes, the great sovereign, Almighty Savior, Jesus is knocking. Here what he says to you, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).

Listen to the Puritan Christopher Ness, "Jesus comes and stands knocking at the door of your heart with the hammer of his Word and the hand of his Spirit, and you ought to bow yourself before him with all your might. Pull back every bolt, and remove every bar that would keep the door shut against this blessed and bleeding Redeemer. The duty indeed is yours, but the ability is his."³

Listen Jesus cares for you. Perhaps you can't hear him because of all the noise in your heart. "Be still and know that I am God" (Psa 46:10), he says to you. *Be still my child. I'll*

² R. Kent Hughes. *Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Preaching the Word Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 83.

³ Christopher Ness. *The Crown and Glory of the Christian* (Amazon Kindle, 2016), 9.

take care of you. I have not abandoned you. Jesus says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (**Heb 13:5**).

JESUS' JOURNEY

Let us consider the journey of our **Lord Jesus Christ**. So there He is, the Christ child—as **1 Timothy 3:16** says, “God manifest in the flesh”. And here’s the amazing good news. He who was the highest the high came down to be the lowest of the low that He would raise us up to the highest heights with Him! The Prince of Life became an impoverished pauper! And “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (**2 Corinthians 8:9**).

Paul tells us plainly in **1 Timothy 3:16** that “God was manifest in the flesh”. He says in **Galatians 4:4-5**, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem them that were under the law”.

John 1:1-3, 14 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made”... and **verse John 1:14**, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”.

Listen to **Jesus** Himself. He said in **John 8:58**, “Before Abraham was, I am”. He said in **John 10:30**, “I and my Father are one,” and they took up stones to put him to death because he “made himself equal with God”. In **John 14:10** He said, “I am in the Father, and the Father in me”. He says in **John 17:5**, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” By His own testimony, Jesus Christ is God robed in a human body.

Mary may have been fearful or anxious. We don’t know what she felt, but we can imagine what she experienced. Yet, in the midst of all the roller coaster of experience and emotion, God was in complete control.

THE SHEPHERDS

What about the **shepherds**? Who were they that they should be eyewitnesses of God’s glory and receive history’s greatest birth announcement? In Christ’s day, shepherds stood on the bottom rung of the social ladder in Israel. They shared the same status as tax collectors and dung sweepers. Only Luke mentions them.

Ancient historical records (Jewish Mishnah) say that these guys belonged to a class of people that had a **bad reputation**. They were **uneducated** and were not accepted by the religious elite because they were **ceremonially unclean** by virtue of their vocation. They represent the outcasts and sinners for whom Jesus came. Such outcasts were the first recipients of the good news.⁴

Surely the shepherds were people with noisy souls. Shepherds were people that were **not very trusted**, in fact, they were known for their **thievery**. They stole things all the time. Because of that, these types of people would never be asked to testify in a court of law. So we are dealing with those who were unacceptable in society.

And yet it is these types of people that God chooses to bear witness to the fact that now Emmanuel is born and “God is with us.”

⁴ R. H. Stein. *Vol. 24: Luke; The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 108.

- Jesus says, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (**Luke 5:32**).
- **1 Peter 5:5**, “be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble.”

People say, “Well, Christians are not perfect people”. All you have to do is look in the mirror and we all know that. The church is a very, very imperfect place. Churches are filled with very imperfect people. Often people think, church is for good people, or for almost perfect people. The exact opposite is true. The church is a spiritual hospital! ***The church is not a showcase for saints, but a hospital for sinners.*** When you go into a hospital, people are in different stages of recovery. Some are in critical condition; some are nearly well, and there are some that are strong enough to care for others. God calls the outcasts of society! He calls those who know they are needy. The question is asked—how far can Christ go in forgiving sinners?

THE SLEEPY TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

All of this angelic activity took place in Bethlehem. The shepherds see the angels and hear the announcement of Christ. They go and worship the Christ child. Then they go out and share the good news with the **people of Bethlehem**. They spread the joy of Jesus throughout the town. Whatever difficulties they were experiencing in life were put aside. There’s not time to focus on pain and problems when you’ve just seen a miracle.

I think it’s so interesting that all of this is taking place in a tiny little town of about 300 people. Bethlehem was such a little town, but it was a very famous town. It’s located about six miles south of Jerusalem. It was the home town of:

- Ruth,
- Boaz,
- Jessie and
- King David.
- It is also place where Jacob buried Rachel.

Bethlehem is a tiny town known for the mightiest and most famous of people. So when God comes into the world, to whom does He announce Christ’s birth to? Does He send His messengers to **kings** and **governors**? That’s first where the wise men came later on. They came to King Herod. But no, the shepherds went to a forgotten town.

Micah says in **Micah 5:2**, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.”

God calls smelly shepherds to be the evangelists and they go and evangelize the town of Bethlehem. And they needed evangelizing. Their souls were noisy with the shame and scandal of Mary’s pregnancy. Bethlehem was sleeping when the virgin gave birth to the Son of God. It wasn’t long though before the shepherds made the angelic visitation known to the townspeople of Bethlehem. “When they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them” (**Lk 2:17-18**).

NOISY SOULS

Some of us have noisy souls. Think of what Mary was going through. We usually think of her as a young woman who is highly favored by God's grace, and she is! But with that favor came a lot of misunderstanding. She is a virgin. Certainly, most people did not believe she was a virgin. Have you ever heard of a **pregnant virgin**?

Noise travels in sound waves, but the noise of the soul travels through noisy thoughts. There is the noise in our soul – noise of anxiety, anger, confusion, even despair. **Mary** must have experienced some of this noise in her soul.

The **shepherds** were also a group of people who were misunderstood. Their occupation often made them ceremonially unclean. They kind of caved into that and became dishonest, smelly people. The noise in their soul may have made them hardened and a bit cynical.

The **townspeople of Bethlehem** may have had a different kind of noise in their soul. You know how small townspeople are? They know everything about everyone. They may have struggled with busyness and being busybodies. Maybe even gossip. I mean this was basically the family of Joseph and Mary. And here comes this pregnant girl into town. They go to sleep that night disgusted that Mary is pregnant with a Baby not fathered by Joseph.

We can relate to that can't we? We have so much gossip and news and entertainment to keep us distracted. We are so busy most of the time.

What noises disturb **your soul**, robbing it of rest/peace?

- Is your heart tossed about by **anxiety** and **fear**?
- Are you torn up inside with **discouragement** and **despair**?
- Are you often boiling with **anger** and **frustration**?
- Perhaps you are weighed down **bitterness** and **hatred**?
- So many are enslaved by **lust** and **greed**?
- Have you been harassed by your own **guilt** and **shame**?
- Maybe you've sought refuge in false saviors like **possessions** and **positions**?
- Or you've tried to quiet the noise with **addiction** or **alcohol**?
- Perhaps you've added to the distractions with **entertainment** and **recreation**?⁵

2. THE PRINCE OF PEACE WHO QUIETS NOISY SOULS (2:9-16)

Now we come to a scene where we are introduced to the one who can quiet our souls. But the truth is, when our souls are overwhelmed, we often don't think God is on our side. We look at God as the one who wants to **crush** us, not **save** us. In order to have the peace of God in your heart, you need to know he has **good news** for you.

Let's go back to verse 8. The shepherds were minding their business in the field. **Luke 2:8**, "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." And something happened. It says in **verse 9** that "an angel of the

⁵ Jim Berg. *Quieting a Noisy Soul Seminar Outline* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2005), 3.

Lord appeared to them, the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were **filled with great fear.**” What kind of angel. The shepherds must have known that angels are not only messengers, but warriors as well.

NO PEACE FOR THE SHEPHERDS! (2:9)

The first we see in this scene are the shepherds just minding their own business. And they see angels!

Judgment Day?

Now these shepherds as we said are sinners. Can you imagine if you are not right with God, and all the sudden you see angels? The Lord’s glory was everywhere. It filled the night sky. What would you have been thinking?

Remember these shepherds were of such a low and deceitful reputation, they were not even allowed to give testimony in a court of law. They were considered untrustworthy.⁶

It says in **verse 9** that “the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were **filled with great fear.**” If you were them, what would you be thinking?

I’d be thinking, this must be *judgment day*. This must be the end. I’m doomed. I’m done for. I’d be saying with Isaiah, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips... for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa 6:3). But instead of punishment, the shepherds get peace.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE (2:10-12)

Who is it that quiets noisy souls? The prophecy is important in **Isaiah 9:6**, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace.**”

The messengers of peace proclaim the Prince of Peace! **Luke 2:10-11**, “The angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you **good news of great joy** that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Instead of rejection, they get embraced. They get God’s love. They get Jesus! This is the Christ. This is the Messiah. This is the King of kings that has been prophesied. This is a very special Prince and King. He’s a Prince of peace. How do we know that? Look at verse 12. He’s wrapped in something. Some presents are wrapped in paper or ribbon. This one is wrapped in something else.

A PRINCE WRAPPED IN GRAVE CLOTHS

Now consider **Luke 2:12**, the angels say, “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a **baby wrapped in swaddling cloths** and lying in a manger.”

The shepherds would not find a king on a throne – not wrapped in the purple robes of royalty, but a Baby wrapped in **swaddling cloths**. Christ did not come as an Earthly Monarch, though he will one day rule the world. He did not come as a General. Christ humbled Himself and became like us – He came as a Baby!

⁶ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 30.

Mary wrapped the Baby is wrapped in “swaddling cloths.” What is that? They are grave clothes. And for a moment we get a picture of what is happening.

Jesus was born to die. God the Father before you were born set His love upon you, and He ordained together with the Son, that Jesus Christ would be the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8).

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God! “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).

THE MESSENGERS OF PEACE (2:13-14)

Who is it that quiets noisy souls? “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (2:13-14).

“A great company” is literally “a multitude”—not fifty, not 150, not 1,500—but beyond count. I think every one of God’s angels was there because this was the most amazing event that had ever happened in the entire universe. I think the heavenly host stretched from horizon to horizon, obscuring the winter constellations.⁷

Their Gospel Message: Peace on Earth

The angels had a Gospel message: On earth... peace! What?! Good news for shepherds and all sinners! That’s a surprise! How about on earth... war! For all we did! But no! Peace! Shepherds did nothing to **deserve** this good news! The angels point to Christ. God shows favor to unworthy people. Peace on earth to sinners with whom God is pleased. What? Wait. Really? What is this? This is the Gospel message. It’s the basis of all joy.

THE RECEIVERS OF PEACE (2:15-16)

Imagine the scene. Here are these humble shepherds. They are the lowest class of people in the community of Israel. Ok, maybe lepers were lower, but not much lower. And they must be thinking “The Messiah is here, and we’re the first to find out about it?” This is amazing!

What is the Shepherds’ Reaction?

So what is their first **reaction**? They begin to run! **Verse 15**, they said “Let us now go even unto Bethlehem...” And **verse 16** says they began to run to Bethlehem, “they came with haste”! Sprinting shepherds! You can imagine how they would have been out of breath as they had gathered their garments into their arm sprinting to Bethlehem, probably jumping over some of the lower fences that were in their way! They have a meeting with God in human flesh.

And finally with gasping breath, they find “Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger” (**Lk 2:16**). The angel had told them, that is exactly where the Messiah would be.

Smelly Shepherds

Now Mary and Joseph would have been surprised! I mean they had just been through a long difficult journey of 90 miles! They were fatigued, not to mention the fact

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 88.

that Mary had just given birth. And so here they are looking at the babe “lying in the manger”, and all the sudden out of nowhere come these **smelly shepherds**, and they’re excited! They’re saying “There He is! That’s the one the angel told us about!” This is the Christ, the Messiah! The Redeemer of the world! And there was God who never sleeps or slumbers is there asleep on the hay. These shepherds’ hearts were no longer cluttered with the noise of complaining or deceit. They were transformed by the peace and joy and wonder of God.

Shepherds Leaning on Their Staffs - Bowing

The Shepherds leaning on their staffs could not have stood too long. They had tended lambs, but now they were looking at the “Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.” And they had to **bow their head** and **bend their knee**. This was an incredible Savior for incredible sinners! All the fears in their **noisy souls** are replaced with overflowing joy!

3. THE PEACE FOR YOUR NOISY SOUL (2:17-20)

JOYFUL SHEPHERDS (2:17)

Look at these joyful shepherds. **Luke 2:17**, “And when they saw it [the baby lying in the manger], they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.”

The shepherds were joyful. These shepherds were now fixated on the glory of God. This is the key to quieting our noisy souls. They fixated on the glory of Jesus so much so that they shared with everyone their joy. Why were the shepherds so joyful? Had their circumstances changed? Were they still not welcome in Temple worship? Were they still the rejects and outcasts of society. Nothing had changed in their circumstances, but everything had changed in their hearts. Now their hearts were filled with joy not based on the tossing waves of our circumstances.

Remember **Isaiah 26:3** is the key, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”

The shepherds no longer thought of their sinful reputation. They forgot about their past and their shame. They were now filled with joy! When they saw the baby in the manger, they became evangelists.

AWE-FILLED PEOPLE (2:18)

The shepherds were so filled with awe they forgot themselves. They forgot their deceiving and their selfish ways. That’s what we need! Then they passed their joy on to the residents of Bethlehem. People in Bethlehem heard the testimony of the shepherds.

Luke 2:18, “And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” They went from a spiritual sleep to a spiritual awakening. They went from disgust with this birth to overwhelming wonder and awe.

If we want true joy, there has to be more of Jesus and less of us. **John 3:30**, as John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” That’s what happens when we hear the good news. We forget ourselves and are **lost in the love of Jesus**. The noise of our hearts decreases as our love for Jesus increase.

Be committed to Christ today. Turn your attention fully to him. That's what the **shepherds** did. That's what the **residents of Bethlehem** did. That's what **Mary** did.

PONDERING MARY (2:19)

What about Mary? We read in **Luke 2:19**, "But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." Mary's reaction to these things was not to think on herself. Not to think on those who judged her. But to think on "these things" – the angels, the shepherds, the fact that the Baby in the manger is God in human flesh. Immanuel has come. God is with us!

We are not called to meditate on our failures and shame. We are not called to meditate on our worries and fears. We are not called to ponder on the wrongs done to us or all the "what ifs."

Filling Up Your Cup

Mary "pondered" and treasured all these things. It's kind of like filling up your cup. What is the cup of your heart filled with. It's Ava's birthday today. One of the things Ava loves to do is to make "pretend soup" in the yard. We take a pot from the kitchen and we "make soup" with dirt and branches and rocks and crumpled leaves. We mix it all together. But when we want to make *real soup* we have to empty out the old stuff. We've got to clean out the pot of the bad stuff and fill it with good stuff. Fill it with vegetables and some good broth and spices. Maybe add some lentils. Yummy! Get that stew going. Then savor that stew and let it nourish us. That's what we have to do spiritually. We need to meet with God. **Ponder** his goodness. **Treasure** his grace.

Mary did what **Psalm 119:11** says, "Your word I have **treasured** in my heart, That I may not sin against You" (NASB).

David said the blessed person, the person of Shalom and wholeness doesn't think or act the way the world acts, but "his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he **meditates** day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers" (**Psa 1:2-3**).

Paul said it this way in **Philippians 4:8**, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.**"

You've got to do as Paul says in **Ephesians 4:22-24**, "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

If you want to change the noise in your heart, you've got to fill it up and overflowing with the words of God's peace! Fill up your heart with God's goodness and grace.

GLORIFYING GOD (2:20)

The shepherds came back to Mary and Joseph and Jesus. They must've told everyone in Bethlehem. It was just a little town, twenty or thirty families. We read in **Luke 2:20**, "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

We must replace our bitterness and anxiety and fear with praise. You can't be **glorifying and praising** God and be filled with all the noise of **toxic thoughts** and emotions.

Conclusion: Richard Wurmbrand

Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand has an interesting view of the difficulties of life. He spent 14 years in prison for preaching the gospel. Although his captors crippled his body, they could not defeat him. In solitary confinement, we could not even pray as he used to. He testifies, "We were unimaginably hungry; we had been drugged until we acted like idiots. We were as weak as skeletons. The Lord's Prayer was much too long for us—we could not concentrate enough to say it. My only prayer repeated again and again was, 'Jesus, I love You.'

And then, one glorious day, he says, "I got the answer from Jesus: 'You love me? Now I will show you how I love you.'" "At once," he says, "I felt a flame in my heart, which burned like the coronal streamers of the sun. The disciples on the way to Emmaus said that their hearts burned when Jesus spoke with them. So it was with me. I knew the love of the One who gave His life on the cross for us all."

Think about this man! There would be every reason for someone like this to have a soul noisy with questions: "*Why God? Why me? Why this?*" But no. There was no anger or rage, depression, despair or bitterness. What was his secret?

He testified, "Alone in my cell, cold, starving, and in rags, I danced for joy every night." What was his secret? A new focus and fixation on the love of Christ. This is not just for martyrs, but for every child of God. This man exemplifies the supernatural joy that can be experienced by every believer with complete fullness of joy.⁸ Come out of the "pit of noise" into the arms of Jesus! Find your comfort and rest and love in him.

*Turn your eyes on Jesus!
Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace!*

Fixate on the love of Jesus, and you will have a very Merry Christmas.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

⁸ Richard Wurmbrand. *Christ in the Communist Prisons* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1968), 46.