

THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS

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Lesson: Any part of Christmas Story

There is so much joy and happiness at Christmas time, isn't there? It really is the best time of the year. People are on holiday, they have happy smiles on their faces a lot of the time, they are enjoying good food and getting nice presents, and meeting friends. And there is a lovely atmosphere, a special feeling at Christmas time which you don't seem to get any other time of the year.

What I want you to think about, children, is that there are two different kinds of joy at Christmas time. They are both good kinds, but one is more important than the other.

The first happy kind of feeling, the less important one, is a joy in things. After all, at Christmas time, you seem to enjoy things more than at other times. There is the food you eat: it is usually better than at other times. You get more candy, cookies, cold drinks and ice cream. Then there are the presents. You seem to get more presents at Christmas time than at your birthday. There are all the exciting things to do—going to see the lights, listening to the Christmas songs, going to parties, decorating the tree, wrapping presents in pretty paper. Everything seems to be fun.

This is one kind of joy—the joy you have in things.

Now the second kind of joy is called a joy in spiritual things. At Christmas time you find you love to hear the stories of the Lord's birth, don't you? Well that happiness you find from those stories is a different kind of joy. It's much better than good food, isn't it? It is a joy that belongs to heaven.

At Christmas time you find that the hymns you sing seem more special than any other songs. You find that you love to learn how the Lord was born on earth, why He came to earth, and what people thought and did when He was born. You also feel a most special kind of joy in your heart at this time that you don't have at other times. We call it the spirit of Christmas—that special feeling that people get at this time of the year. And we know that we get it because the angels of heaven are specially near to the earth at this time, and are giving us their joy. That wonderful feeling you get is far nicer than the joy of eating food or getting presents.

You see, these feelings you get are not the joy in things. They are a better joy: a heavenly joy. They are of the mind. And the wonderful thing about spiritual, heavenly joys is that they make us kind to others. That is the real spirit of Christmas - that good feeling that makes you want to think more of other people. It makes you want to quarrel less, and it makes you want to think of someone else even before yourself.

There are two kinds of joy at Christmas. There is the joy in things - in presents, candy, food, games, pretty paper, and so on. There is the joy in spiritual things—in learning about how the Lord was born, and feeling joy because He was born, and feeling kindness to one another because the spirit of Christmas is in our hearts.

Now some people want the one kind of joy without the other. They want the fun of nice things, but they don't care to think of the Lord, and why He came to earth. There are many people like that, and if we are not careful, we could be like that too. Some people think of Christmas only for the presents, and the fun, and the good food and the exciting things they do. They don't think of the Lord at all, or if they do, it's just for a little while in the time they are sitting in church. Then after that they think: Now I've been to church, and now I can have real fun. And when they say, "real fun," they mean the fun of things.

We could be like this, couldn't we? We could spend our time in worship listening to the stories of the Lord's birth, and the angels would try to make us feel the happiness of spiritual, heavenly things; but our minds would really be thinking of our presents, and all the things we were going to do instead.

If that is so, then we will only really have the one kind of joy, the lower, less important one. It is not a bad joy, but without the heavenly joy, it can turn into a bad thing. After all, when you are thinking only of the fun of getting things, you are thinking rather selfishly, aren't you? You are thinking, "what is my next present going to be?" or, "I hope I get the biggest piece of cake," or, "I want to be the first to do this, or that." You are having fun, but because there is not the heavenly joy with you, it is selfish fun. Perhaps you will find that you will start quarrelling with each other, and thinking only of what you want. And a lot of the wonder of Christmas will be spoiled.

But it's very different if you really turn your hearts towards spiritual joy as well as the joy of getting things. Let your minds really enjoy the stories of the Lord's birth. Think of the Lord, coming down to be born a baby among us: Why? So that He could lead us all to heaven. Think of His great kindness to us, and of all the things He did for us on earth. Think of the happiness of the angels when He was born, and of the shepherds and wise men who came to worship Him. Then the spirit of Christmas comes down and fills your mind with real joy, heavenly joy. Then when you enjoy all the things of Christmas, you can think to yourself: It's not in the spirit of Christmas unless others have as

much fun as I do. You can learn to share things, to let others have the first turn, or the nicest piece of cake: because thinking of others is what Christmas is about. It was because the Lord loved us far more than we can imagine that He came down to earth and lived among us. And He came to teach us this kind of love—the love that is of heaven—the love that makes us want others to have as much fun as we are having.

The Lord wants us to have both kinds of joy at Christmas time. He wants us to enjoy nice things. But heavenly joy is the more important. You can have that, if you are rich or poor, sick or healthy. If you have the joy of heaven at Christmas time, then the joy of earth is a really good joy. It will not be selfish. It will be heavenly too. The angels have good food and give each other presents too: and they do so in the spirit of Christmas. Can you? *Amen.*