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I've recently finished my annual Christmas epistle to family and friends. I was happy with the result. I did a "take-off" on the old movie: "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly" with bullet point summaries for each of those adjectives along with a few more thrown in. Under those bullet points I wrote some breezy news about this past year in the Fox household. I was tempted to include a few points encapsulating both the emotional highs and the lows of these past 11 months, but my lovely wife, the editor, talked me out of it. Such talk hits a little too close to home since we all experience them. People don't want to hear about such things at Christmas time, or do they?

So, Christmas letters are usually a lot of fluffy stuff. You've all received them and probably penned a few, as well. You know the type: The kids are all happy and handsome, the vacation was delightful, the careers are always on an upward trajectory, etc. Very seldom does anyone tell the real in's and out's of life over the past year. And if someone let's some "secret" slip out, we scratch our heads and puzzle over their truthfulness. We've all come to expect breezy happy talk in Christmas letters.

What's fascinating to me is that God doesn't do any of that in His Christmas epistle to us. When you read Luke 2 or various other Christmas story texts, God spares no details. He literally "tells it like it is." First, there is the section of Mary getting pregnant via the Holy Spirit and having to tell Joseph that she wasn't unfaithful. It's hard for him to comprehend it all, but by God's grace, he does. Then, by taking her home as his wife—ahead of the planned ceremony, they both have to endure scorn and sideways glances from the small town folk they live with.

Then comes the difficult journey to Bethlehem for the census. God's Son's arrival there came about via a long donkey ride. No fancy coach for Mary. It must have been very uncomfortable and trying. And when they arrive, there is "no room in any inn!" Couldn't God have planned it out better? Couldn't he have booked a room ahead of time? But, of course, God wanted the stark, humble nature of His Son's birth to stand out in juxtaposition to what we humans would expect.

So far, it's not a breezy story of joy, is it? The stable where they finally bed down is cold, stinky, and the animals are no doubt loud. Then come the labor pains! Mary's cries pierce the air along with the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle. The local mid-wife must have surveyed that little "kingdom" and shaken her head.....All this contrasts sharply to what comes next.

The angel choirs appear to the shepherds. The shepherds run into town and kneel around the Baby Jesus. Joy permeates the air. Joy permeates heaven itself. The Savior of the entire world has been born! God has kept His promise to save His people and done so in

the most contrary-to-expectations manner possible. Joseph is content, awed, and overwhelmed. Mary is happy and exhausted. And the Baby Jesus is dearly loved because His love has permeated the entire locale—including His parent's hearts.

I'm glad that God didn't write the Christmas story as we humans do our Christmas letters. I'm glad that He was totally honest about what happened and didn't spare some of the nitty-gritty details like we usually do. I'm glad He didn't "dumb it down" and leave out all the miraculous details, thinking: "It will be too difficult for sinners to understand it all." Indeed, all the Christmas texts ring out with sincere authenticity, don't they? They reveal to us a God Who deeply cares for fallen human beings. They show a side of God which is intimate, caring, and tender. He never leaves anything to chance when it comes to our soul's salvation, including facts which are far beyond our understanding.

Every year of our married life, 37 to be exact, I've written a years end Christmas letter to family and friends. We've kept all those letters as they are a wonderful review of our lives. Hopefully they entertain, enlighten, and bring a smile to their readers. However, my letters are but a poor reflection of the Real Christmas Letter, penned by God Almighty in Luke chapter 2. His letter is an eternal summary of the greatest event in world history: The human birth of God's Son to save fallen humankind. It is the opening chapter of: The Greatest Story Ever Told. And since it still is read and pondered over. Since it still quiets fear and displaces doubt. Since it uplifts and brings real joy, well, it just goes to show that God is a much better Writer than any of us. So read His letter again in these days before Christmas and learn the real meaning of that word: Rejoice!