Christmas Eve 1991
JOY IS POSSIBLE

If you stop to think about it, it wasn't a very good time to have a baby. The Hebrews as a people and nation were on their last legs. Things had been going from bad to worse for several generations. Now they were completely under the rule of Rome. It can't be very pleasant to be an occupied country and completely ruled by outsiders, no matter how competent they might be. It's no wonder there were demonstrations and uprisings almost every week, with crucifixions by the hundreds in an attempt to keep things under control. There was excessive taxation, as you might expect under the circumstances, and a burdensome collection of those taxes.

There was a spirit of discontent among the people; they were restless, despondent, and jobs were hard to find. Even the Temple was not what it used to be. People who longed for leadership heard only the mumblings of bureaucrats, the Scribes, and Pharisees.

So a young prospective mother waiting for her first baby might well have asked herself the question, "What future can there be for my child in a world like this?" No, it was not a very good time to have a baby. But is there ever a good time? Is our time that much better? Our national debt is at an all-time high. We are mortgaging the future of our babies. Racism is not dead. The country is in a recession. There are countless homeless people in the world. Forty thousand children die from illness and starvation each day. Problems with the environment are growing.

The fact of the matter is that there is never a completely good time to have a baby. The world is never exactly the kind of world you would like to bring a child into. We can go on and say there is never a totally right time to do anything good and great. The time is always, to varying degrees, out of joint. It is never completely the right time to raise money for a new church addition, to vote on a school bond issue, to get married, to raise a family, or to buy a house. It is never the perfect time to turn over a new leaf, to break a bad habit, or to take on a new responsibility. The times are never quite right.

But Mary went straight ahead and had the baby anyhow. When Mary was informed that the Spirit of God would rest upon her and use her as a channel for God's power and grace, Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be according to your word." In other words, even though it's not the right time, I'm ready. The times may not be exactly right. The state of the country is in a mess. There's not much future for my child, but if that's what God wants me to do, I will do it, and I will do it gladly. I will pour into it all my gift of tenderness, motherhood, sacrifice, and care, as if the future were as clear as the sun at midday.

Mary accepted the situation and went ahead gallantly to do it as well as she knew how. That is the way to go when times are not particularly good.

There are many people in these days who are making a considerable struggle and effort to lead a decent life, and it is not easy. There are many influences that weaken the foundation of our lives, that invite us to live on lower levels. Yet, like Mary, we realize that in spite of threats to civilization and to the life as we know it, life goes magnificently and irresistibly on. Young people still fall in love, no matter what happens, and babies are born, and families are kept

going, and difficulties are met with a courage that is surprising when you see it. Discoveries are still made, and appointments with destiny are kept.

The times are never quite right, but it's not the times; it's the person that counts. Yes, Mary went right ahead and had her baby in spite of the times, and her baby was and is the Savior of the world.

Think of it! In the worst of times, new life springs forth, and where we least expected it. It implies all sorts of things about the energies and powers of God. Just when the old civilizations are about to fall, a new one is born.

I believe joy is possible this Christmas and every Christmas because Christmas reminds us, above all, that when life looks as if it were about to break down, it is most likely to bring forth something new. Keep that truth in your mind this Christmas Eve. Let it open the doors of the future for you.

That is why there is a joy about Christmas that is undefeatable and that undergirds all our sadness. Joy is possible for these reasons: The times are never right. But it is not the times; it is you and other people that count. When life looks as though it were about to break down, it is most likely to bring forth something new and wonderful. For there is always to be found somewhere one or more obedient servants of God who bring forth new life, wrap it in swaddling cloths, and place it tenderly in a manger. Amen.