TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 94-CELEBRATE

I'm Jill Baughan, and you're listening to the podcast called Find Joy...No Matter What.

This is Episode 94…found in the Bible with reflections written mostly by Ted Ellis…who happens to be my brother.

If you're in a tough place right now, your joy may seem like it's hiding--or gone.

I understand. But it's still there, I promise, just waiting to be resurrected. And this podcast is designed to help you do just that...no matter what else is going on in your life.

For just a few minutes each typical week, I'll tell you a story, and then, we'll consider how it might speak to your life.

This week, however, I have something special for you. If you're listening to this episode when it drops, it's just a few days before Christmas--the time of year that is so very loaded with activity and emotions. And sometimes it's easy to focus on the busyness and the feelings that there's no room to be still, and experience the wonder of the birth of Jesus.

So this is your invitation into a space meant to quiet your mind, bring peace to your soul, hope to your heart and joy to--not only *the* world--but *your* world.

Please, feel free to come to a complete stop for these few minutes, maybe darken the room, sit in the light of your tree or a candle or two. If you have a nativity scene, you might want to place it in view, and let me re-introduce you to each character…because each had a place and a purpose in the Story.

Together they form the tapestry of our Christmas Celebration.

Yet, individually, each speaks to us in a different manner...from a different angle...from a different set of experiences.

Let's enter in.

Dear Heavenly Father,

We come to you in the midst of a beautiful, yet busy time. We thank you that you have given us these moments to focus on you.

Please keep us from distractions in our heads, in our homes, and maybe in our hands right now.

Open our hearts to your message. We pray in the name of the one you sent to us as a baby and whose birth we celebrate tonight. Amen.

<u>The Prophets</u> ***Isaiah 9: 6-7a***

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, [b] Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.

It started long before the first Christmas. The history of the people of Israel, recorded from generation to generation, is one of following the rules.

We all rely on rules to function: traffic rules, school rules, job rules. Try as they might, it became nearly impossible to *learn* all the rules, let alone obey the various shades and interpretations of them. Combine this with their constant problems as a nation (which, incidentally, they never thought were their fault).

Among the unseen characters in the nativity are the prophets. Those were bold and many times abrasive people who insisted in talking straight to the people, whether it was popular or not. Many listened to the prophets, but either could not or chose not to hear. That is why the people expected a warrior who would defeat their oppressors rather that *overcome* them. That is why we find it easier to look for a savior who will make our problems go away rather than to stay with us through them. But that is why he was called "Immanuel"..."God *With Us."*

<u>The Angels</u> (*Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:28-29)*

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you are highly favored! 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 favor with God..."

The angels, God's messengers, appear throughout the Bible, but never as often as in the Christmas story. Whenever we mortals are confronted with angels, our reaction is exactly the same: FEAR. We know this because the first words the angels always speak are those which are translated, "Don't be afraid."

Is it because, in the very presence of a heavenly person, we recognize our own sinfulness? Is it because we carry a nagging fear within us that God is determined to punish us for the sins only we know we have committed? Is it because we know that, no matter how good we try to be, we always fall short of heaven?

No matter. For the angels bring us hope, not fear...from the birth of Christ to His resurrection, the angels follow their "Don't Be Afraid" with "Because..." "...because I bring you good news...because you are favored...because He is not here; He has risen."

How wonderful that, when we are afraid, we have a God of Good News...Who brings us love.

<u>The Wise Men</u> (***Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11)***

1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi [a] from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east [b] and have come to worship him." 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east [e] went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

The traditional creche always includes three "wise men" and their camels, even though the scriptures record their visit some time later. In any event, they are an odd addition. They didn't fit into the culture. And, while God had chosen the humblest of settings to deliver His Son, these obviously smart and wealthy men were attracted to Him also. God's Son had little need for Gold, Frankincense, or Myrrh; however, inborn in each of us is a need to *give.*

How wonderful that His presence opens our hearts to give...even when we feel as if we don't belong.

<u>The Shepherds</u> (***Luke 2:8-10a)***

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, 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 of great joy that will be for all the people.

Shepherds...unskilled, unwashed, unknowns. Out in the hills just doing their jobs. In contrast to the Magi, they had nothing to bring...and, anyway, their invitation came at the last minute. It is surprising that the most glorious of announcements was made to the least impressive hearers...while at work, no less.

How wonderful that our God is a god who will come to the least of us, bringing us surprises beyond our expectations, often while our lives are at their most boring points.

<u>Joseph</u> ***Matthew 1:18-21,24***

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through

the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, [c] because he will save his people from their sins." 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

The brief account of Joseph's encounter with an angel does not speak in detail to the emotions he must have felt. The initial disappointment of learning that Mary was with child, was compounded with the agony of wrestling with a decision which would not be easy no matter what the outcome. Note that Joseph had *already* made his decision...and then the Lord helped change his mind...in that order.

How wonderful that our God is one who speaks to the perplexed...and never stops showing us His way.

Mary (*Luke 2:1-20)* Many scholars have suggested that Luke's account of the Christmas Story must have included details that could only have been furnished by Mary:

Chapter 2
1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3 And all went to be taxed, every one to his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, into the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; because he was of the house and lineage of David. 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6 And so it was, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were, in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field nearby, keeping watch over their flock at night. 9 And lo, an angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ [a] the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, good will toward men." 15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger.

17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child, 18 and all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

How wonderful that our God is one who speaks to the to the deepest part of our hearts, and brings reassurance…even when we don't understand His ways.

How wonderful that God stepped out of time and space...To become flesh and blood just like us. ...Who was comfortable with those who, according to our standards, were above him...or below him on the social register.

...Who could enjoy a wedding reception with the best of them...and could cry with those who mourned.

...Who fought the temptation toward power and influence...and who understood the concept of living one day at a time, because he, himself, was homeless.

...Who knew what it was like to be disappointed...misunderstood...lonely.

...Who came to us as a baby, who grew through adolescence, and who experienced the full range of human emotions.

...Who is there when we are confused and perplexed.

...Who is present even when our lives are uneventful, waiting with surprises beyond our wildest dreams.

...Who is near when we don't quite fit in...when what we have to give seems inadequate.

...Who is there when we are afraid.

…Who is there to bring reassurance when we don't understand his ways.

How wonderful that He came to be "Immanuel"...*God With Us.*

Numbers 6:24-26

24 "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

Shalom to you, my friends. And Merry Christmas…