

The Christmas Gospel

Christmas Day

12/25/20

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's Word comes to us this morning from our Old Testament reading where we hear these words once more from the prophet Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings tidings, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."" (Isaiah 52:7 NIV) This is the Word of the Lord.

The wait... is over. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has come to save and redeem his people. The Lord himself has come in flesh to bring peace with God... and comfort to longing hearts. The little baby born in Bethlehem to Mary, IS the long expected Messiah come to reign forever. And that is good news!

Although everything I've just said is entirely true, beloved... how many Christmases have we celebrated where we pause beside the manger.. check off those truths in our minds: "Yep.. got it... I know that already, Merry Christmas," ... and then we move on from there to the other festivities of the day? We know the good news - and many of us for so long - but sadly... our reception of this Christmas gospel... can become sort of routine.

If that is the case... do we really grasp the good news? Do we realize just how good it truly is? Let's consider the context: Long before the birth of Christ - Isaiah takes us to the hills and mountains of Jerusalem - just a stone's throw away from Bethlehem. The dust from battle settles. A messenger speeds up and down the ragged terrain as fast as his feet will carry him... How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

So, what's the good news? The battle... is over! God is the king of victory. The Lord hasn't left his people for dead - He's returned to help and redeem. He flexes his holy arm for all nations to see his salvation. He is God. He reigns. Salvation comes from him.

I'm not sure if the people in Isaiah's day really understood how good this news really was... simply because it hadn't fully happened yet.

For them it was good news of things yet to come. They sat on the edge of their seats waiting, watching, wondering, "What's the good news?"

They knew salvation was coming... but from what enemy? They knew the Lord would return and reign... but what would his kingdom look like? They knew the Lord would stretch out his holy arm... but was this a figurative arm like the one that snatched them out of slavery in Egypt? For some... the prophecy sank in... but for many... it just sort of became routine. "Ok... the Messiah is coming. He will bring salvation. Got it." and then they went on with business as usual. Did they get how good the good news really was?

There... in the same hill country just outside Bethlehem... came that long expected news. Angels appeared to shepherds and proclaimed peace on earth between God and mankind. As quickly as the Shepherd's feet would carry them, they sped to a manger in a stable to find the Christ child. Then... their feet carried the message back over the hills of the Judean countryside to friends and family. The Savior had been born. Salvation from the enemy had come... because that child was THE one who came to crush the serpent's head.

The Lord had come to reign... but his kingdom wasn't of this world; his glory was hidden in humility... wrapped in swaddling cloths. And sure enough... he did have a literal arm... two of them in fact. And that little arm sticking out of the swaddle... was the holy, mighty arm of God, reaching out to save all of mankind from sin. That little arm would grow into a man's arm ultimately... for the purpose of being stretched out and nailed to a cross... to pay the penalty for the world's sin. He is God. He is king. He is Savior.

In order to really let it sink in... and understand how good this good news is... take a closer look at that baby in the manger. Yes he came to save sinners... but do you realize that you... are one of those sinners he came to save? Yes, he came to die for the sins of the world... but do you realize he also came to die for your specific sins? That little arm flailing out of the swaddle would one day be pierced.... because of your and my disobedience. The one Mary held in her arms and treasured in her heart - the king of creation - would one day be valued at a mere 30 pieces of silver... be betrayed and killed because you and I - personally - would one day sin against God.

Friends... there is nothing generic or routine about the good news God has for you. The fact that it is good news for all people of all time doesn't make it any less special. It is good news for you, too... personally!

And what is the good news? Well it's not "what,".... it's "who." It's Jesus Christ - eternal God - in the flesh like yours and mine.

There in the person of Jesus Christ... God didn't just redeem his people... he redeemed you... He redeemed you from slavery to death and sin and Satan. The eternal Word made flesh didn't just come to bring peace between God and mankind in general... he came to bring peace between you - a damned sinner - and God - who is holy and perfect.

You and God are no longer enemies. He is your Father and you are his child through faith in Jesus Christ. That little baby born in Bethlehem to Mary... He isn't just a king over Israel.... he is your king. He rules both your heart and all things for the good of you and all believers. He is your God. He is your king. He is your Savior.

Take more than just a routine pause beside the manger this Christmas, and look a little closer. We're not mere observers, looking in on the nativity, as though it's something from long ago... far removed from our modern lives. Stop... and kneel beside the manger as recipients of the good news. The fact that we hear this good news again and again, year after year, doesn't make it more routine. Rather... it makes it all the more amazing, don't you think?

Think of all that has changed in the world or in your life since last Christmas. The promise and proclamation of peace between you and God hasn't changed. Think of all the terrible, disgusting news that has aired the past twelve months. Well guess what: Jesus Christ - risen from the dead - still rules victoriously - your God reigns over all!

Even though each day since last Christmas to this Christmas you have struggled with sin and stumbled... even so... your Savior has good tidings of comfort and joy - all your sins are forgiven... because of Christmas. Because the Lord came for you. Because Christ came to be your brother. Because Jesus came to save you. Because the Lord laid bare his holy, saving arm for all nations to see... and by his grace... we too have seen it... and have believed it.

That is the same, beautiful Christmas gospel. It hasn't changed... and praise be to God... it never will. This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.