

December 25, 2023
The Nativity of Our Lord
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Isaiah 52:7–10

The Greatest Joy of All

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

The inner child in us all longs for Christmas and the joy that Christmas brings. It's joyous to break out into song, singing Christmas carols and be comforted with the glad tidings. It's a joy to gather with family and friends, retelling the Christmas memories of years gone by. It's joy to give gifts and to receive. But perhaps greatest of all is the joy of anticipating the Christmas feast. It beckons us home to where there is the love of family, home, and feasting. We long for all of these God given gifts. It's the joy of Christmas calling you and it has been calling for years.

Our Old Testament text is full of many joys, including a prophecy saying:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of [those] who bring good news, who [proclaims] peace, who brings good news of happiness, who [proclaims] salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” (Isaiah 52:7)

Isaiah's prophesy foretells multiple elements that would indeed be fulfilled: the defeat of Babylon, the Jewish exiles to going home, and the temple being rebuilt. But Isaiah sees even further into the future, foretelling the coming of Jesus. (cf: Lessing, Isaiah 40–55, Concordia Commentary, 571–572) That my friends, is the source of true joy. In verse 8 Isaiah writes about the voice of the watchmen. These watchmen are not only the watchmen on the city walls, but they're also shepherds watching their over their flocks by night who:

“... went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” (Luke 2:16–18)

Isaiah writes that these watchmen:

“Together they sing for joy...” (Isaiah 52:8)

... because they will see with their own eyes the coming of the Lord. They were eyewitnesses who sang out with joy – and 2,000 years later we continue to sing their songs of joy in our liturgy: the Benedictus, Magnificat, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, and Nunc Dimittis. We sing them because Zechariah, the Virgin Mary, the shepherds and angel hosts, Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Simeon, all saw the Lord's coming with their own eyes. Seeing the Lord accomplish salvation in history inspires the joy of our singing.

If a song can make you happy, how much louder can true happiness make you sing? Isaiah urges us to:

“Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 52:9)

Christ Jesus, your Lord of salvation brings true comfort and joy. But as the text says, the song of joy is **only** for those in the waste places. It’s only the waste places that are in need of salvation. Imagine a junk yard, an auto salvage yard filled with wrecked and demolished cars. While they still may be cars, they’re wasted and ruined. In the same way, you and I still bear the image of God; however, it’s wrecked and ruined because of our sin. As sinners, you and I are the waste places. If we say we have no sin, if we refuse to believe we’re the waste places and ruined by our transgression, there cannot be true joy. There cannot be forgiveness and salvation. It’s only the ruined sinners, the broken, those who need the Lord’s comfort, who sing for joy. Jesus says:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

This comfort is a gift from God and your heavenly Father loves giving gifts, especially the gifts that bring joy and salvation. The Christ Child who was laid in the manger was born the Savior and Redeemer. He came prepared to battle to save you and to bring you joy. Isaiah says:

“The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations...” (Isaiah 52:10)

It’s just as God told Moses:

“I am the LORD... and I will deliver you from slavery [in Egypt], and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.” (Exodus 6:6)

The psalmist sings:

“Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.” (Psalm 98:1)

It’s quite the imagery! ***“The Lord has bared his holy arm.”*** At His birth, Jesus’ holy arm was bared indeed, when:

“... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” (John 1:14)

Good News had arrived in flesh, righteous and bringing salvation. For unto you a Child is born... with a tiny infant voice crying out. The same voice would one day cry out rebuking demons, the wind and the sea, as well as the Scribes and Pharisees.

For unto you a Child is born... with tiny flailing arms ready to work salvation. When all was fulfilled:

“The LORD... bared his holy arm...” [to be ***“... pierced for our transgressions”*** (Isaiah 53:5)] ***“... before the eyes of all the nations...”***

... as the Roman soldiers nailed Him to the cross.

“The LORD... bared his holy arm [so] ...all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” (Isaiah 52:10)

For your salvation Jesus stretched out His holy arm between you and the Father’s wrath for your sins. As the blood flowed from His wounds, what was once a tiny voice cried out:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

Because of His holy arm, you and I and all mankind have reason to sing with Isaiah:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.” (Isaiah 6:3)

John the Baptist cried out:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

But you and I, the least in the kingdom of heaven, (cf: Matthew 11:11) wrecked and ruined in our sin and shame, have reason to sing those words with greater joy than John.

When His parents presented Jesus at the temple, Simeon:

“... took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation... (Luke 2:28–30)

Yet you can sing those same words with higher joy than Simeon, because of the Christmas feast we are about to receive is the greatest joy of all.

On Christmas we see the salvation of the Lord, the Word made flesh, laid in a manger in Bethlehem. There was no royal pillow for the King of Kings. Although precious blood flowed through His veins, He wasn’t laid in a treasure chest. Born to make sacrifice for our sins, He wasn’t born in a synagogue, but in a stable.

As an adult Jesus would say:

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51)

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...” (Hebrews 1:1–2)

... who told the five thousand He had just fed with ordinary bread to seek Him rather than food that perishes. (cf: John 6:26-27) But who could imagine how literally Jesus would be the living bread on the night he was betrayed?

His holy arm was bared and nailed to the cross two thousand years ago. From the cross that once tiny voice cried out:

“It is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:30)

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. We rejoice with loud singing of joy because His holy arm, His whole body and blood reaches all the way through time to you, here and now at this altar for the forgiveness of your sins and the strengthening of your faith. Your Salvation, who first appeared in a manger:

“... is the bread that came down from heaven. . . . Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” (John 6:58)

Celebrate with high gladness. Break out into songs of joy together, you wasted places and ruins, for the Lord has comforted His people. He has redeemed you. Welcome home to the Christmas feast. This is the feast of victory for our God. The Lamb has been slain. His blood sets you free

from the wages of your sin. Just as Isaiah looked forward to multiple elements that would indeed be fulfilled, there is only one element left to be fulfilled. This Christmas feast strengthens and keeps you in body and soul until Christ returns and for resurrection of the dead and the blessed reunion of all the saints on the Last Day.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.