

Christmas Day Celebration

December 26, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Isaiah 52:7-10

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!" Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. (NIV)

Did you get what you wanted for Christmas? Have you told anyone yet about what gifts you received? One of my childhood memories for Christmas is not just opening my gifts, but I remember looking forward to seeing my friends to tell them what I got. Especially, if I got something I thought was great! I was eager to get to church on Christmas Day to see my friends and tell them the good news. Even as adults don't we still enjoy sharing the news of some gift we were hoping for and now have.

Wouldn't this even be more true if we got a life-changing gift for Christmas? I would like you to imagine being a prisoner of war. I've read stories about the hardships that POWs have faced over the years and can't even imagine, but I would like us to try today. You are held hostage in a foreign country. You are hungry, tired, and chained along with thousands of others in a dark, gloomy prison. You wonder how much longer you can last in these conditions; it has already been three months since you have last seen the light of day. Today is Christmas and suddenly some U.S. soldiers come in. "*Merry Christmas everyone, the war is over, you are free to go home and live in peace.*"

Could you think of a better Christmas gift than that? Think of the excitement of returning home to your family. Imagine the thrill of running into the arms of your loved ones. Picture the joy this gift brings not only to you, but also to those at home awaiting your return. This is a message to tell all and tell quickly! You probably wouldn't even wait until you saw your friends at church! The phone lines would be ringing among the relatives, "*they're home, they're home, what wonderful news!*" Dear friends, that is the good news we have this morning, but in reality, we have a message of deliverance even greater. We have been given a gift - a gift to enjoy and a gift to tell about, as on this Christmas our Lord brings us: **A Beautiful Christmas Message.**

The people of Israel saw what it was like to be on a losing side of a war. After many years of disobeying the Lord, after much corruption and idolatry, God finally allowed them to be taken into the hands of their enemies. This once great nation fell and fell hard. Jerusalem, the great and holy city, lay in ruins. Many of God's people, in fact, became prisoners of war as the Babylonians carried them away as slaves, while only a small scattering of people remained behind in Jerusalem. Most became captives in Babylon and for about 70 long years that is where they would stay.

But God is about to change everything. After using Isaiah to point out their sins and call them to repentance, God now promises salvation through one Isaiah calls "***the servant of the Lord.***" The Lord also promises that the ransomed of the Lord will return home and in chapter 52 of Isaiah that time has come. "***Awake, Awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion***"(Isaiah 52:1-2).

In our text, we have the picture of messengers sent ahead with this news. We read: "***How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.***" I don't know about you but I have never thought of feet as being one of the most attractive parts of a human body. Sure some feet might be shaped a bit better than others - but to call them beautiful? But do you get the point here? Why are these feet so beautiful? Why will the people love to see them? It is because of the message they carry. It is good news. It is a beautiful message.

These are messengers "***who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"***" Do you hear the good news these feet bring? "***Peace.***" "***Freedom.***" "***Good tidings that God's people are coming home.***" "***Salvation.***" "***Our enemies are defeated***" "***God is still in control. The Lord rules all things, and rules them for the good of His people.***" "***For the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.***" This message brings comfort and joy not only for those returning, but also for those who remained in Jerusalem. The Lord will restore their city. Isaiah explains, "***The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.***" Babylon lies broken, and God's people are free. The deliverance and salvation of God is for all the nations to see. Israel will publicly return home.

This beautiful message quickly spreads. "***Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem.***" The watchmen on the tower hear the message first. When they hear it they, in unison, give a ringing cry. They spread the joyous message. After the watchmen spread the word, the city joins in the celebration. The people go from sorrow to rejoicing. They go from desolate, lying in sorrow and grief, into bursting at the seams in joy. Indeed, the ruins of Jerusalem should rejoice for now they are about to be gloriously rebuilt.

We might think: How does this apply to us? What does this mean for you and me on this Christmas 2010? We live in America where we are free and we aren't in exile under heathen rule. But Isaiah is promising to Israel, to us, a greater spiritual deliverance. We are born into slavery and held captive by the devil. From birth we are bound hand and foot as captive slaves to sin & death. This is why God's Word from Isaiah is a beautiful Christmas message that causes us to rejoice. We too are delivered. For the "***servant of the Lord,***" about whom Isaiah foretold, that would bring salvation, has come. We are celebrating His birth today. We have the good news. "***Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord***"(Luke 2:11). We have peace, peace between God and man. We hear the angels. "***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests***"(Luke 2:14). Our God reigns and through Christ has conquered our enemies, namely, sin, death, and the devil.

Yes, the salvation that all would see is not just the return of Israel to Jerusalem. There is another very public deliverance. That is the salvation that was won when the Son of God was nailed to the cross - the salvation that comes through Christ. That is the salvation that John the Baptist prepared the way for when he quotes Isaiah saying, "**All mankind will see God's salvation**"(Luke 3:6). That's why Jesus was born. He came to free us. He came to bring us salvation. To turn our lives of sin from sorrow into joy - to comfort and deliver us.

And I have one question for you: how do you see the feet of the messenger who told you this news? What do the feet look like of the person or people who first shared with you the true meaning of Christmas? The feet of those who told you the news that Christ came to earth, born of a woman, to keep the law perfectly in your place. The news that Jesus shed his blood willingly on the cross for you, for me, for everyone. The news that Christ rose conquering death, and that we too will live forever. I pray we see their feet as beautiful because they have shared with us a gift that lasts forever. Their feet are beautiful because they bring us good news - the best news of all.

I would like to encourage one thing from each of us here this morning. May our feet be beautiful to someone else. "**How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news.**" Think of someone who needs to know what Christmas is really all about. Think of a person or people in this new year that you can tell. Tell them the good news that you have a Savior who took your sins away. Tell them that your Savior is their Savior too. Tell them that you did get what you wanted for Christmas because God gave you His Son. Tell them how Jesus has freed us - how the Word became flesh to give light all of us who were once trapped in darkness. Tell of a God who has delivered us from a place much worse than any POW camp, and has set us on the path home to heaven. I pray, like with my good gifts I got as a child, we can't wait to tell our friends! What a beautiful Christmas message! Enjoy it. Tell it. Amen.