

**December 25, 2011
Christmas Day**

"Good News of Great Joy"

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!"⁸ 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.⁹ Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.¹⁰ 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.

Imagine for a moment that you are one of the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born. You gather around the fire to keep warm. You look up at the stars and seem so small and insignificant compared to all the stars. You wait for your turn to watch the sheep. Suddenly an angel appears to you and the glory of the Lord shines all around you and you are overwhelmed with fear.

But then the angel speaks to you personally. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord." The good news of great joy is the best good news you have ever heard in your life.

"Good news of great joy." Last night and again this morning we heard this good news of great joy spoken to us personally, not on the fields of Bethlehem, but here in God's Word. We shared this good news of great joy with Christians all over the world.

There are so many different ways to appreciate this good news of great joy. For a few minutes this morning we want to use these words of the prophet Isaiah from our Old Testament lesson to have these good news of great joy raise us to great levels of peace and joy in our Savior's birth.

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news." There were not cell phones when Jesus was born, or newspapers, or internet service or Facebook. People carried the news by running from one city to another as fast they could. Remember the runner who ran the 26 miles to the Greek city of Marathon, delivered his message and then died. Even ugly feet are beautiful when they bring good news. The shepherds used their feet to spread the good news that Jesus the Savior was born and lying in a manger in Bethlehem.

Run. Tell the good news. Proclaim peace. Bring good tidings. Proclaim salvation to anyone who will listen. Here is the good news you need to hear and share: "Your God reigns." When you look at the baby Jesus lying in a manger, you know that your God reigns over your life and has you under his control.

Listen to how Isaiah 9:6 says your life can rest in the hands of this child that was born for you. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders." The government will be on his shoulders. That does not mean Jesus is going to take over the government, but it does mean that he has come to take control over certain critical areas of your life and mine. The next verse after Isaiah 9:6 says, "Of the increase of his government and peace

there will be no end.”

I want this baby born in Bethlehem, my Lord and my God, to be my king and take over my life. My sins have put me on the path to eternal death and destruction. My father used to tell the story of his dad, my grandfather, who took the family in a drive in their brand new model A Ford. He stopped at the top of the hill. The family got out to look over the valley and have a picnic. Then he heard a noise, the car was moving. He had not set the parking brake correctly. It was moving so fast down the hill he could not catch it and it crashed into a tree, a mangled mess of metal. Where would I be if Jesus had not come to this earth to be my King of kings and Lord of lords? The Bible tells me “It is appointed unto man, once to die and then comes the judgment.” There is nothing I can grab on to in this life to remove even one tiny small sin that will be held against me.

Our dear heavenly Father knew exactly what was necessary to save us. That is why he sent his Son to be our Savior. There was no one else to do the job. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” It was 8:30 in the morning, a few years ago, when a fire broke out in the kitchen of a New York City apartment. A little baby, one month old Eric was in terrible danger from the smoke that filled the house. His mother held him out of the third story window. Standing underneath was a man, a stocky man named Felix, a catcher for his baseball team. The mother dropped Eric and Felix caught him. Felix gave him mouth to mouth resuscitation and pushed two fingers into his little chest to help him start breathing again. That was certainly good news of great joy a man saving a child. What about a baby saving a man, saving the world? That would be spectacular news, good news of great joy. God has sent his son to rescue you and take control of your life and save you. That is the greatest news the world has ever heard.

Now let’s look at the baby more closely and listen to what the Lord says about his mighty power in verse 10. “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.” The Lord pictures himself as a mighty warrior going to battle for his people. In verse 8 he calls on his people to shout for joy and burst into song because the Lord was going to find a way to bring his people home to Zion after being captured slaves for 70 years in the land of Babylon. The Lord provided a king named Cyrus who defeated the great city of Babylon and then made a decree that God’s people could go home.

What does the Lord your God want for you more than anything else? He wants to bring you home to him as your heavenly Father, and enjoy his love forever. Christmas is a time to be home with the family and even more important to be home with our God. The most popular Christmas song of all time is: “I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas.” It was written by Irving Berlin on a hot Christmas Day in Southern California 70 years ago. He longed to be back East in a white Christmas. It became a hit that same year because the nation was at war in 1941 and families thought of their sons and daughters longing to be home for Christmas. They listened to the song with tears in their eyes as it was sung by Bing Crosby. We all want to be home where people love us and care about us. God our Father wants us to be home with him. That is why Jesus came to be our mighty warrior to give his life for us and bring us. In John 17 Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.” By having God’s Son you have the eternal riches of his love that lasts forever.

Permit a story to illustrate how the Lord our God bares his mighty arm through his Son to give us everything. Years ago a wealthy man and his son collected priceless works of artists such as Picasso, Van Gogh and Monet. The son decided to leave home and serve his country in time of war. Shortly after his son left, the man’s wife died, and shortly after that he received the word his son had died in combat while carrying a fellow wounded soldier to safety. Christmas came, and there was a knock at the door. He was greeted by a soldier who said, “Your son saved my life in the war.

I want to give this gift to you." It was a pencil sketch of the man's son captured on paper before he died. It was crudely done but captured his son's look and personality. Years later the man died and the day came for his artwork to be auctioned. People came from all over the world to bid on the priceless works of art. The first piece to be unveiled for auction was not a Monet, or Picasso, or Van Gogh. Instead it was the sketch of the man's son. The auctioneer opened the bidding at \$100. No one said a word. The auctioneer pleaded, "This sketch must be sold first. Who will take the son?" No takes. Finally, one person, a nearby neighbor said, "I loved that boy. I'll bid \$100." The gavel fell. The crowd cheered eager to get to the expensive art pieces. Then the auctioneer stunned the crowd by saying the auction is over. The will stipulated that anyone who takes the sketch of the son gets all the other works of art.

Anyone who takes the Son has eternal life. Look again at the gift your heavenly Father has given you in the gift of his son. Believe in this child as your Savior, and you have everything. Believe in the Son and you will be home with your heavenly Father's love in this life and for all eternity. Look at the baby Jesus and believe these words of Isaiah are true for you. "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." Hold out your little finger and let the baby grasp your hand as little babies love to do. Look at the little hands and believe that your Savior, your mighty God, your warrior God, has allowed his little hands to grow into adult hands to be nailed to a cross just for you. You weren't on the fields of Bethlehem, but once again the Lord has given you the privilege of hearing this good news of great joy this Christmas season. Amen.