

12-25-22- Christmas Day

Sermon- Who Will Be the Messenger?

Scripture- Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-4, CTW- Ps. 98

Hymns- 182, 181, 173

Theme- For the Advent season it was good to remind ourselves of the nature of the greatest gift. Now we find out that we are called to dedicate our lives as a thank you note to the one who sent the gift. Today the scriptures ask, "who will lift up their voices, who will go forth to sing the praises of the greatest gift ever given?"

I. Introduction: Christmas is ...

"Christmas is sleigh bells. Christmas is sharing. Christmas is holly. Christmas is caring." At least that's what Percy Faith once wrote. In his not-so-familiar holiday song, entitled, "Christmas Is", he tried to capture some of the things that make Christmas, Christmas.

The sights, sounds, and feelings – apparently that's what Christmas is. And most would agree.

Actually Christmas is about much more than just sharing warm emotions and memories. It's about what God supplies and shares.

Christmas is about God's faithfulness made tangible through history. It's about how God has touched our lives with his love. So, what is Christmas? Well, CHRISTMAS IS ... 1) For People Who Have Nothing, and it's 2) For People Who Need Everything.

II. Christmas is For People Who Have Nothing

Would you believe that this text from Isaiah is a 2,500-year-old Christmas greeting from God? It is. God originally sent this

greeting to those Jewish people who were exiled in Babylon (present-day Iraq) in the sixth century B.C.

The Lord also had the prophet send this greeting to the ragtag handful of people who remained behind in Jerusalem, the once proud capital of the Jewish nation.

A. Can you imagine their mind-set? Whether they were hauled off to Babylon or remained in the ruins of Jerusalem – it must have seemed that their whole world was out of control. Their ancient homeland of Israel, once promised to their ancestor Abraham and his family, was destroyed.

Their worship life was in shambles. The sacrifices they offered, which foreshadowed the work of the promised Savior, were no longer offered on the huge bronze altar outside the temple. In fact, the temple, built by great King Solomon, had been trashed and torched by the armies of Babylon.

There must have been an ache in their hearts as these people prayed to God. They had nothing.

Is this how God's promises to Adam and Eve to Abraham and to David would end – with a whimper in the desert of the ancient Near East? Of course not. God is faithful.

B. God sent a greeting of hope to these hopeless people: "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!"

The God of faithful love and mercy came to his weary and lonely people with a message of good news. "Your God reigns!" God would make it possible for those exiled in Babylon to return home.

The Lord of the universe would grab the reigns of world government, and would send the Persian Empire to topple proud Babylon. The Babylonian exiles would return back home to Jerusalem. He would establish peace.

And so, messengers ran ahead from Babylon back to Jerusalem proclaiming this wonderful news, "Mom and dad are coming home! Babylon is conquered! The exile is over!" What a message for those who had nothing! Families would be united.

C. No wonder those messengers seemed to have beautiful feet – their feet brought good news.

We can relate to this Christmas greeting because in reality we are a people who have nothing. As we stand before God we see our sins are cause for a spiritual exile. God has every reason to cast us out of His presence – to send us away from his goodness.

Adam and Eve gave up the complete, wholesome, peace that was theirs in Paradise. As a result, we lack that perfect peace. In fact, we don't even deserve it. We don't even deserve the little blessings God gives in our lives.

We don't deserve our homes, our families, or our livelihood. We don't deserve this church. We don't deserve God's message of hope. The truth is we deserve to be exiled to sin and death forever.

We, too, are a people who have nothing.

Oh! We may have tinsel and toys, Christmas lights and presents. We may have the things that provide temporary pleasure, and we might think that's enough.

Our sinful hearts may think its enough to hear Christmas carols on the radio, to see the lights in the oak trees, to taste Christmas cookies, or receive a peck on the cheek from underneath the mistletoe. But that's not enough. Such things cannot fill our hearts with peace.

It's at Christmas that many people feel depressed and alone. It's at Christmas that we miss loved ones who have passed away. The glitter of the holidays just isn't enough to keep peace in our hearts. That is not what Christmas is.

For Christmas is nothing, and we have nothing, if we don't have and share God's greeting of "good tidings."

III. Christmas is For People Who Need Everything

The God of history, our all-powerful and merciful God, intervened in the world scene for us all. He has made it possible for us to have peace. He gives us everything we need.

A. Messengers have come to us. And they are beautiful!

The Christmas angel came to the shepherds that first Christmas announcing, "Peace on earth!" And God has sent his Christmas greeting to you, "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!" In Second Corinthians, Paul Says that All Christians are to be engaged in a ministry of reconciliation: 1) being reconciled to God themselves, and 2) reconciling people to each other and to God.

That's what Christmas is all about. And that's just what we need. God gives us what we need right here in his holy Word. He gives us a message of hope and love, and he gives us the ability to receive it, believe it, and pass it on.

B. We've been given just what we need. God has delivered us. That's the perfect gift. The Hebrew word for "deliverance" in this text is really the root of the name, "Jesus." The name "Jesus" means, "He saves", or "he delivers." Jesus Christ is what Christmas is all about, the reason for the season.

He is the Son of God and Son of Mary who came to trade himself for us in life and death. The One who had every right to condemn and exile us found a way to pardon us without violating his own perfection. Christ came to deliver us from the guilt of sin and the fear of death.

He came to deliver us safely to his home in heaven. Christmas is all about needy people and how God has supplied all our needs. He's provided the best gift of all, our deliverance. In fact, he's even unwrapped this gift for us: "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."

God has given us just what we need – his holy arm. He's laid it bare, rolled up his sleeve and went to work for us.

IV. Hear the Message, Be the Message, Deliver the Message Some of us are familiar with the old Popeye the Sailor cartoons. Inevitably, Popeye would find himself in a bad situation. He'd get beat up by Bluto and he'd be worn out and weak. So, he'd turn to his trusted can of spinach. As soon as he'd eat the spinach, his muscles would grow, his strength would be revealed.

And it was usually impressive. Popeye's muscles would be pictured as a battleship, or as a powder keg of dynamite. He revealed his strength by showing his arms – his muscles.

A. Much like Popeye, God reveals his arm for you. God rolled up his sleeve, revealed his muscle, and went to work to deliver you and I. He demonstrates his strength, but it's not pictured as a tank, a mighty army, or as some cartoon-like super hero.

Our Lord unwrapped his glorious might by allowing himself to be wrapped up as a small child in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. The Savior laid bare his powerful arm by covering himself in flesh. He revealed his splendor and strength by living, dying, and rising for you and me.

B. Again, we've heard the glad tidings of the angels. The messengers have come to our hearts again and brought wonderful news of deliverance from sin, death, and the devil.

Every time we hear the Christmas message – God’s good news greeting – we are assured that we are not sentenced forever to live in an inside-out, upside-down world. In Bethlehem God came to assure us that he has a better life in store for us, a life forever in his presence.

Christmas is more than holly, tinsel, sparkling snow, or children’s laughter. Christmas is not for people who want everything and need nothing. Christmas is for people who have nothing and who need everything.

Christmas is God’s good news greeting of peace to a world of sinners. It’s the “good news of great joy that will be for all the people”, and that “today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

Now, that’s what Christmas is. Hear the message, be the message, spread the message...Amen. Let Us Pray...