

Grace Lutheran Community, Christmas Day, 2017

The LORD has displayed His holy arm in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. Isaiah 52:10

Good morning... Have you ever entered a room and greeted someone with 'Good morning' or 'Good day', only to have the response, 'What's so good about it?'' But today we say, 'Good Morning!' 'Good Morning!'

What makes this a 'good morning' depends on two things.

First of all, what makes this a 'good morning' depends on the reality of what this day is all about. This is the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Saviour. This is the day when we celebrate the coming of the almighty God into this world. This the day we celebrate the certainty and the knowledge of God's love for all people.

The prophet Isaiah once described the people of this world as "a people walking in darkness... a people living in the shadow of death" (Isaiah 9:2). In many ways, this is not a bad description of life in this world. Many people are living in a 'land of shadows'. It's dark and scary here. We don't know the meaning of everything we see or hear. We can't always tell what is coming next. We so often walk in darkness. What we think is best often ends up being wrong. We do wrong things. And there are wrong things in this world that bring us pain. Pain is a part of life here in the land of shadows.

In response we sometimes are tempted to ask in our soul, "Is God out of touch with what we are going through? Doesn't He know how things are here – in our world; in our country; in our cities; in our homes – in the land of shadows?"

But today, as Christians, we celebrate the gift of a marvellous light that has come into the world. During Advent, as you lit your advent candles at home, you may have repeated an advent verse (from John 1:9), "The true Light, who enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." And today we celebrate that that light has come...

The prophet Isaiah says, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

Our message this day is that in Jesus God has come into this world. He has come to bring His word. He has come to bring healing. He has come to bring hope. He has come to bring forgiveness. He has come to bring new life by His very life, by His death on the cross, and by His resurrection from the dead.

This makes this a 'Good Morning' for us all!

But... there is a second part for this being a 'Good Morning' for us all, and that is, we need to appropriate this 'Good News' to our lives.

Isaiah tells about some pretty excited people. Watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem who say, “How beautiful are the feet!” and they lift up their voices; they shout with joy and burst into song. These watchmen see people running over the distant hills with good news – news of peace, news of salvation – that God is king! But to appreciate the watchmen’s enthusiasm and joy, we need to understand the depth of their despair.

The Israelites were supposed to be God’s people forever! They were circumcised and set apart to the Lord, who delivered them out of slavery in Egypt, and made his covenant with them. But they abandoned God. They went off and worshiped false gods. After warning them time and again through his prophets, God gave his people away so they would learn how great their sins were

Oppressed and defeated, outnumbered and punished, captured and humiliated, other nations ridiculed them and their God since God had allowed this to happen. Do you ever hear someone say: “If God is all-powerful, why would he allow sin and death to enter the world?”? People think that the presence of evil means God isn’t as powerful as we say he is. It’s just like the mockery of foreign nations as they saw God’s people overthrown by the Babylonians.

The Israelites had lost everything. How would you expect the people to be emotionally or mentally or spiritually? They were demoralised. They were lifeless, dejected, disheartened. And the worst part of their sadness – now they knew it was their own fault. Now many of them could see how destructive their sin was. The greatness of the devastation they experienced emphasised the greatness of their sin. This was the most humbling and lowest moment of their lives.

This section continues the theme of the last chapter, making the link with the repetition of the call “awake” (51:17 and 52:1). Now the LORD calls Zion to awake from her sleep because He will not allow His name to be blasphemed any longer (1-6); in fact, heralds announce to Zion that God has come to reign (7-8), prompting the call for Jerusalem to rejoice because God has brought salvation (9-10). The section closes when the righteous are exhorted to come home because the LORD will protect them (11-12).

And so Isaiah says, “Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.” Oh, the great joy of declaring once again, “The LORD makes his home with us again! He has redeemed us and bought us back as his own! Forever we shall be the people of the LORD!”

What does their joy then have to do with us today? Their joy wasn’t just the joy of deliverance from the rule of foreign nations. It was the joy of a people totally dependent upon their God, with a God who was totally dependable. It was the joy of the LORD being home with them, fighting for them, ruling in power and might over all things for them again.

Isn’t that your joy too?

If you hear on the news someone winning \$10,000,000 in a lottery of some sort, we may say that this is 'good news' for them. But, if you are the person who has won the \$10,000,000 your life will be different! (And this is not to condone gambling). Also, if you hear of some person who has received some good news in terms of remission from cancer, you would say that this is 'good news'. But, if you are the person who has received good news in terms of remission from cancer, your life will be different!

It is one thing to hear about some thing; it is another for it to happen to you!

This is a morning celebrating 'good news' because God is not only a part of our world, but that God is also a part of our lives. He is a part of your life...!!

What do the ruins of our hearts see when we behold a lowly manger on the outskirts of Bethlehem? What does the sadness of your soul hear in the angel's announcement to the shepherds – "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord"? Immanuel – "God with us" – makes His home among us. This is not just a baby boy, this is God made flesh, who comes to be our King and fight for us! We have the same joy, don't we, from Isaiah 52 that they had!

Remember what chapter of Isaiah comes after this? What is the prophecy that describes God's Chosen Messiah fighting for his people? Isaiah 53: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted...he was led like a lamb to the slaughter...Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities."

Did you hear that? Jesus justifies us – He makes us right with God again! We who are ruined and destroyed by sin can burst into songs of joy! This is how Isaiah says God "will lay bare His holy arm in the sight of the nations."

We rejoice in the coming of Jesus into this world. We are loved by God in Christ. He has come into this world to redeem us and grant us true joy, and freedom, and love. In Jesus, has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. That's what makes this a 'good morning' for us all, even as we carry our crosses. For, as the writer to the Hebrews says of Jesus, "He, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame..." (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus was born into this world to be the Saviour of the world. Jesus was born into this world to be YOUR Saviour.

Today in many homes there will be much fine food and feasting (as we also will come to the Lord's Table). We can truly say, 'Good Morning!' We can celebrate because we know that God has come into our dark world in Jesus. We, who live in a land of shadows, can also experience peace, and hope and joy because God comes to us in Jesus. This salvation is secured by the One whose birth we celebrate today. And every day of our lives may be lived in the light of His love. 'Good Morning!' Amen.