

In Jesus name, who is, who was, and who is to come, our Savior in flesh and in glory, dear fellow redeemed,

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father, and Christ Jesus our Lord, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:2,9,10) Amen.

## Joy to the World!

"Tis the season to be jolly!" Most will agree that Christmas is a time of joy. Throughout the world, people are celebrating this day. The world speaks of this holiday as a time of kindness, a time of giving, a time of friendship and family, a time to rejoice and be merry. But when asked what really makes you happy about Christmas, can you put it into words? ... a comfortable living, a comfortable chair, a fulfilling job, a good meal, family, parties, friends, a team that wins the Superbowl... These are some things that make people happy – at least for the moment.

Is JOY something that comes just one time a year around December 25th and is gone days later. Paul writes: *Philippians 4:4 — 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!* Doesn't sound like something that comes and goes, does it? While the joys of this world are here today, gone tomorrow, the true JOY of Christmas is a JOY for every day, every week, every life. This is NOT a JOY that is of the world NOR of the things in the world. This is a **JOY that is to the world**.

We consider the Word which was made flesh as He is revealed in

*Isaiah 52:7–10 (NKJV) — 7 How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" 8 Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, With their voices they shall sing together; For they shall see eye to eye When the Lord brings back Zion. 9 Break forth into joy, sing together, You waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The Lord has made bare His holy arm In the eyes of all the nations; And all the ends of the earth shall see The salvation of our God.*

This is the Word which became flesh and dwelt among us.

Lord, sanctify us by Your Truth, Your Word is Truth.

One way the Scriptures give us a sense of the meaning of JOY is by setting it in contrast to its opposite. *Psalm 30:5 — 5 ...Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning.*

Notice the contrast. Joy is set opposite of weeping. "Joy" is perhaps best defined by its antonyms – concepts like "sorrow," "suffering," "death" give us a sense of the word. That is, joy is the absence of "sorrow." Joy is the absence of "suffering." Joy is the the absence of "death." IT IS THE END OF THE BAD NEWS.

***7 How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news***

Yet as we know, before that moment of JOY dawns on the mountains before us, there is a time of darkness, a time of bad news.

The bad news Satan brings to you is no different than the darkness spoken to Adam and Eve. He lays before you the promise of a better life – as if God is holding out on you. If you just make the choices that feel good, if you will just ignore that voice within that accuses you, if you will just ignore the warning God has given in His word, you can find joy. Its like that twisted question: 'God wants me to be happy, doesn't He?'

Sin doesn't bring the glad tidings, it brings the bad tidings. When the world supposes a little more giving, kindness, and family time spent this month is the meaning of Christmas JOY, it really ignores the unending wrong that lies with in every one of us. It ignores sorrow that precedes the JOY.

Joy is the absence of "sorrow." Joy is the absence of "suffering." Joy is the the absence of "death." What is needed to find real JOY is the end of that which has caused all these evils in us and around us – SIN and DEATH must be defeated.

Paul quotes verse 7 in his epistle to the Romans – *Romans 10:14–17 — 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

The JOY of Christmas is not our kindness, our giving, our behavior, rather it is a message, something to hear and believe. It has been packaged in that gift of God's Word. It is unwrapped as it is studied, pondered, proclaimed.

Notice how this is emphasized in our text: ***7 How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation...***

As we said before God has declared JOY TO THE WORLD. It is not in the world or of the world. JOY is not a feeling within you; It is a report, a message, a proclamation, an announcement, a declaration of sins forgiven. It is the end of that declaration of what we deserve, and the beginning of what God gives in Christ – the good news.

***7 How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him ... who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"***

Soon after Isaiah writes this, the Jewish people will be carried off as slaves to the Babylonians. They will face a period of sadness and suffering. Their homeland will be handed over to a foreign people. Yet Isaiah writes: "Your God reigns!"

And verse 10 – ***The Lord has made bare His holy arm In the eyes of all the nations;***

How can this be? The arm is a picture of might and victory. How can Isaiah say that our God has laid bare His strength and power when His people lie conquered and suffering? How can our God reign when you, His people, suffer here on earth? Where's the JOY?

These are not exactly the right questions. The right question is asked by Isaiah as he begins chapter 53, *Isaiah 53:1-2 — 1 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.*

Who has believed it? This is the question. Who has believed that the arm of the LORD is revealed in the lowly coming of this Jewish Rabbi, born of a lowly family, born in a lowly barn, raised in the lowly village of Nazareth. Who has believed that this is the source of JOY – One who would be condemned and crucified by the people He came to save. Indeed, it would take faith to believe such a thing.

This is the arm of the LORD revealed – the strength and might of our GOD stripped bare. God reigns in suffering. He conquers in being conquered. Through the humble coming of His Son, He humbles all. By submitting to all, all will submit to Him. *Isaiah 53:4-5 — 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.* The birth of Jesus is the arm of the LORD being revealed. Christ Jesus is the end to sorrow, the end to suffering, and the end to death; He is the end to sin.

***10 ... all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.***

To know the birth witnessed and recorded in Scripture is to see the salvation of God. In the crucifixion of this One whom the nations despise, the moment of God's power and

victory are witnessed. In the proclamation of the gospel that goes forth from among the people of God, the ends of the earth are seeing the salvation of our God.

Unto and in the last day this will be ever true. *Revelation 1:7 — 7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*

For now, while living here on earth, this remains hidden from the eyes of our flesh. We see it with the Spirit-opened-eyes of our heart. As did Simeon, *Luke 2:30–31 — 30 ... my eyes have seen Your salvation 31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,*

The appearance of the Christ is the appearance of JOY. For in this cross-bound infant, the LORD redeems Jerusalem. Those faithful who were carried off to the captivity of Babylon, despite all outward circumstances, saw this JOY. They heard in these verses, good news. They saw God restoring what was lost – not their health or homeland, not peace with other nations or families or friends. Believers see the peace of God hidden in the midst of suffering. This is what it means to rejoice always. We know that the suffering, death, and resurrection of God's Son means victory for God and us too. In the midst of every trial, and trouble, even now we have this victory which awaits its full revelation in heaven.

Psalms 98 is the basis of the hymn, "Joy to the world." This psalm has appeared in over 4 of our services this season. Notice how clearly this psalm speaks of our joy in terms of God's victory.

*Psalm 98:1–4 — 1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. 2 The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations. 3 He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. 4 Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.*

Christmas JOY is to know that heaven is not a maybe, but a certainty. Your God reigns. JOY is to know that in Christ you have already died and risen. JOY is to know that through baptism, you have entered into the presence of God's kingdom. Although outwardly you are perishing, suffering, sad; inwardly you are alive eternally. Don't be mistaken, being a Christian does not mean a big smile on your face all the time. In this flesh you will doubt; you will be depressed; you will feel pain. Yet despite all these things, you have an eternal JOY that cannot be taken away. By believing in Jesus, you have seen the end of sorrow, you have received the end of suffering; You live in eternity already. As Jesus said in John 5, "He who believes in me has passed from death to life."

It is the dawning of salvation that has come to us freely and completely in the birth of our Savior that puts a “NEW SONG” in our mouth. We are resurrected from silence to sound forth to all the world a message of JOY.

*9 Break forth into joy, sing together, You waste places of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.*

Perhaps one of the most consistent contrasts to JOY as emphasized by Scripture is silence. True JOY is not something that causes us to shrug our shoulders and move on. JOY means the end of silence. The expression “break forth” describes such a contrast. As Isaiah uses the expression also in chapter 14, *Isaiah 14:7 — 7 The whole earth is at rest and quiet; They break forth into singing.*

From a resting, silent world, incapable of expressing or knowing true JOY, comes forth a heavenly cry: “GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH, PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN!” Likewise the Shepherds returned from seeing the Christ Child by glorifying and praising God!

In our weakness we are often not the JOYOUS Christians we should be. We mope. We don’t always live as if this victory is ours. This is why JOY is proclaimed among us not just once a year. The gospel is believed and treasured not even just one day a week. Sunday after Sunday, Monday after Monday, Day after day, Season in, Season out – we break forth from silence. We are reminded again and again that our JOY does not rest in how we feel today, nor how we have live up to the JOY we’ve been given tomorrow. Our JOY is the proclamation of IMMANUEL – GOD with US. Now and forever, God is with and among us in Zion.

*Isaiah 40:9 — 9 O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”*

Zion is the spiritual dwelling place of God’s people in Christ. This is where God sounds forth His good news of victory. This, here, now, is Zion. For here in this gathering of believers is where the watchmen lift up their voices, bringing the good news over the mountains you face; this is where salvation is published.

*“...sing together...”* This fellowship of the gospel is not a song to be sung in discord. It is not as if one church sings this salvation and another sings about that – There is ONE SONG, and we SING IT IN UNISON. As Paul writes in Romans, “with one mouth we glorify God...”

This day, from Peace thru Christ in Madison to Messiah in Milwaukee, from Luther in Fond du Lac to Faith in Markesan, from Michigan to California, from Tanzania to Uppland Sweden, we gather for ONE REASON; we break forth with ONE VOICE to

declare Joy to the World, to receive the joy that comes to us in the one born to us today...

"Tis the season to be jolly." While family, friendship, and food this season are wonderful, our songs of JOY are not fa, la, la...

We are sing a JOY that is much deeper and more lasting...

*Mild He leaves His throne on high, Born that man no more may die;  
Born to raise the sons of earth; Born to give them second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!" (TLH 94).*

So what is JOY? Can we put it into words? JOY is spelled J-E-S-U-S. The birth of Joy is the birth of Jesus. For this alone is a JOY that will never be hindered, that will never end, A JOY TO ALL THE WORLD. As the angel spoke, *"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10)*

AMEN!