

One of my favorite Christmas carols is a carol called, “God Rest You Merry Gentlemen.”<sup>1</sup> It still gets played sometimes on the radio today. The words go like this: “God rest you merry gentlemen let nothing you dismay, for Jesus Christ our Savior was born upon this day, to save us all from Satan’s power when we had gone astray. O tidings of comfort and joy. O tidings of comfort and joy.” Those who bring the message of Christmas bring tidings of comfort and joy. Today we will see that

### Christmas Messengers Bring Good News

I. “Your God Saves”

II. “Your God Reigns”

First, Christmas messengers bring the good news that your God saves. Our passage begins, **“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news” (Isaiah 52:7)**. Often a messenger would be sent ahead to a city to announce that a battle had been won. Here Isaiah pictures messengers appearing on the mountains to announce good news. The messengers’ feet are called beautiful because they bring good news. Isaiah goes on to define more precisely what this good news is. This good news is a message of peace, a message of good tidings, and a message of salvation.

First, it is a message of peace. **“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace” (Isaiah 52:7)**. What kind of peace did Jesus come to bring us? We are reading today from Isaiah 52, in the very next chapter Isaiah said, **“The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5)**. Jesus brings the peace of sins forgiven. Christmas messengers proclaim peace. Christmas messengers also proclaim “good tidings.” Our passage says, **“who bring good tidings” (Isaiah 52:7)**. Again, the angel on Christmas night was a messenger of good tidings. Isaiah seems to have in mind people who are desperate to hear good news. Isaiah appreciates this good news so much that he exclaims: **“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news” (Isaiah 52:7)**. Are you also desperate to hear good news? Maybe in 2019 you have had to deal with a good deal of bad news. The message of Christmas is good news that brings us comfort. Later in the reading Isaiah says, **“The LORD has comforted his people” (52:9)** Later in the book of Isaiah it says, **“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you” (66:13)**.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes people just need to hear good news. The biblical message of Christmas is good news. The message of Christmas is that **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16)**.<sup>3</sup>

Next Isaiah shows us another aspect of this good news. This good news is about salvation. Our passage says, **“who proclaim salvation” (52:7)**. Isaiah says that the Lord will work this salvation with his holy arm. **The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all nations” (Isaiah 52:10)**. The arm of the LORD refers to God’s power to save. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, God revealed his arm by parting the Red Sea. It’s interesting, isn’t it, that on Christmas, God revealed his arm, he revealed his mighty power to save by sending a little baby. But that’s exactly what we needed. We needed God to take on human flesh. We needed him to live a perfect life in our place and die an innocent death for our sins. That’s what we needed in order to have everlasting salvation. It says, **“The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 35:10)**.

Messengers of Christmas bring good news of peace, of good tidings, and of salvation. The angels proclaimed all three of those things to the shepherds on the first Christmas night. It says in Luke chapter 2, **“The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, I bring you good news (there’s the proclamation of “good tidings”) that will**

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<sup>1</sup> I got some information on this carol from the entry in Wikipedia.

<sup>2</sup> Passage located with help of biblegateway.com.

<sup>3</sup> “God so loved the world” is the theme of the WELS C19 Christmas emphasis.

cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior (there's the proclamation of "salvation") has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." And then a great company of the heavenly host sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace (there's the proclamation of "peace") to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14). The birth of Jesus gives us peace, good tidings and salvation.

And this good news is for all people. Each one of us is a Christmas messenger. The apostle Paul quotes the beginning of our passage for today in Romans chapter 10. There he says, "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? How can they hear without someone preaching to them? ... As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news'" (Romans 10:14-15). Christmas messengers bring good news. Who do you know who needs good news? Think about how you can bring them the best news of all. Because the same Christ who was born for you was born for them. The same message that saved you can save them.

The messengers of Christmas bring the good news that your God saves and, secondly, messengers of Christmas bring the good news that your God reigns. Verse 7 builds up to a climactic announcement that your God reigns. Listen to how the verse builds up to this climactic announcement: "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!'" (Isaiah 52:7)

Sometimes it may appear to you that something else reigns. Sometimes it may appear to you that death reigns. Sometimes it may appear to you that addiction reigns. But for the one who believes in Jesus, those things don't reign. Your God reigns. Jesus' resurrection broke the reign of death. Your baptism has broken the reign of addiction over you. When you were baptized, you died with Christ and were raised to new life with him. That means that those things don't reign over us anymore. Jesus does. By taking on human flesh, God showed that he was not going to abandon us to sin, death and the devil. The letter to the Colossians says that God "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Colossians 1:13). This is good news and it gives us great joy. Isaiah talks about the reaction to this good news. And the reaction is that the people break out into shouts of joy. "Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy" (52:8). Isaiah even pictures the ruins of Jerusalem bursting forth with shouts of joy because they would be rebuilt. "Burst into songs of joy together, ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem." (52:9). Jesus came to be our Savior. He gives us the forgiveness of sins through faith in him. And someday he will give us complete salvation and healing in heaven. And this good news causes us break forth in joyful singing on Christmas Day.

I would like to end today, by pointing out that this lesson from Isaiah has a lot of similarities to one of the Psalms. It's Psalm 98. For example, Psalm 98 also talks about "God's holy arm" (Psalm 98:1). Psalm 98 also says, "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God" (Psalm 98:3). Psalm 98 also talks about bursting forth with shouts of joy. It says, "Shout for joy to the LORD all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music" (Psalm 98:4). Psalm 98 is the psalm appointed for Christmas Day in our lectionary. In fact Isaac Watts used the last four verses of Psalm 98 as the basis for his famous hymn, "Joy to the World."<sup>4</sup> So whether your favorite Christmas carol is "God rest you merry gentlemen" or "Joy to the world," let's sing it with joy today. Let's sing it with joy because we have heard the good news of the Christmas messengers. We have heard the good news from Isaiah and from the angels. We have heard the good news in sermon and in song. We have heard the good news that God sent Jesus to be our Savior. We have heard the good news that Our God Saves and that Our God Reigns. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> C. T. Aufdemberge, *Christian Worship Handbook* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1997), 82.