

*"I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, 'Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely.' And he became their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name."*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

My wife left for Ontario on Boxing Day, to visit our grandchildren and to help our daughter, whose husband is travelling this week. She arrived very late on the 26<sup>th</sup>, so there was no time to see the grand kids in either family. But early in the morning, our granddaughters woke her up, and dragged her downstairs. They were excited to show grandma the new toys and things they had gotten at Christmas. When I called that morning, they were actively involved in playing with all these things. They were excited at what they had received and wanted to share it with everyone—with grandma, with mom and dad, and with any visitors who may stop by.

Do you remember that kind of excitement on Christmas morning? Do you remember other times when you just couldn't wait to share with others the wonderful gifts or kindness you had received from others? A young woman receives an engagement ring, and she goes around, showing it off. "Look! Look! I'm engaged!" A young man hands out cigars, or better today, chocolate cigars, and boasts of being a new dad. Children definitely get it: you just have to share what you've been given. Yet somewhere along the way; at some point in time, the news seems old and passe. We don't have to tell it anymore. Everyone knows it, anyway.

I wonder if we sometimes feel the same way about the gracious gift that God has given us through Jesus Christ, our Saviour. In our text today, Isaiah starts off by announcing, *"I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love."* He will tell, recount, mention, and acknowledge to anyone and everyone what God has done. Are we still eager to do that? It so often seems as if we have simply taken for granted the good news of all God has given to us in the birth, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Do we still feel the blessing and the excitement of that gift, like a child unwrapping a new present on Christmas morning? As Isaiah tells us that good news again, he encourages us to remember, with joy and thanksgiving, the wondrous, undeserved and priceless gift we have received, that we may be filled with the joy of sharing it with others, too!

The story of the birth of Jesus Christ is a telling one. God told it to Adam and Eve. The prophets told the people. Gabriel told Mary. The angel of the Lord told Joseph. Mary told Elizabeth. Elizabeth told Zechariah. Angels told the shepherds. The shepherds told all they met. The Holy Spirit told Simeon. God set a special star in place to tell the wise men. The wise men told Herod. When they returned home, they surely told others. The Bible told me, as did my parents, my pastor, and Sunday school teachers. I've told my children. Now I'm telling you!

There is a Christmas song that reminds us, "It's a story that never grows old". Stories are told. They are remembered. One of the special parts of this season is the Children's Christmas service, as the boys and girls of the Sunday School tell that wonderful truth of God's love and grace. But it often seems that today that we are more observers than participants in this wonderful story. We have heard the story of Jesus' birth many, many times. But how often have we told it? We are so blessed to know this good news, but it is news that is meant to be told and retold and retold!

So, what keeps us from speaking this glorious truth? Could it be that we are uncomfortable with the whole story? Isaiah had to declare that, in spite of God's faithfulness, the people *rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit*. Our story isn't any different. We rebel against God and His holy will. Even though God had said, *"Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely."*, we do deal with Him falsely. Of course, we don't see it that way. We just see ourselves being more progressive than the nations of old. We think we understand things so much better today, that we don't see how God's law, given in ancient times, can have the same meaning for us as it once did. The saddest reality, and the proof of our rebellion, comes from the fact that we feel free to interpret God's will based on our desires, understanding, or expectations, rather than looking to what God says, and holding on to it in accordance with the clear teaching of His whole word. It is not only our world that believes everything is relative. We often take that same approach to God's truth—it's all relative, based on our desires or pre-conceived notions.

Our attitude towards God's Word can keep us from knowing, and therefore sharing, what we have been given. There aren't a lot of people who want to hear (and therefore there are fewer preachers who want to say) that we are really condemned criminals, sitting on death row, waiting to die. People didn't like it when Isaiah said it. Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern for daring to suggest it. Jesus cries out: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"* (Matthew 23:37, ESV) We rob the glory of God's story of its power, its joy and its meaning when Jesus becomes more of a love-in hippie than the Mighty Redeemer.

Yet that is what God has given us: a Mighty Redeemer. The words of Isaiah apply to you and to me, too. The story of the Christ is not just His story; it is our story. The Child born of Mary is, as Simeon declared, *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."* (Luke 2:32, ESV) He is God's gift for all people! He is the hope—the only hope—of all mankind.

*"I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love."* Isaiah thinks of all God has done. When Adam and Eve put themselves above God in the perfection of Eden, they were separated from God. Yet God revealed His compassion and promised them a Saviour. He reaffirmed that promise to Abraham, through whom God would bless all nations. He declared that good news and promise to the children of Israel—His chosen people, even though they turned away from Him so often. In the face of our sin, unbelief and lostness, Isaiah declares: *He became their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.*

In God's perfect plan; when the time was just right, as Paul declares in our Epistle lesson, *"God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."* (Galatians 4:4-5, ESV) God came to share in your affliction. He came to be afflicted to free you from the affliction of the law. Look at how quickly that starts, as He, who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords has to flee from the jealous anger of a maniac like Herod. Isaiah prophesied of the Christ, saying: *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."* (Isaiah 53:3, ESV) Yet He came to share in your sorrows, your struggles, your pains. Scripture reminds us: *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."* (Hebrews 4:15, ESV) That High Priest is also the perfect sacrifice, that takes away the sin of the world and redeems us—He buys us back from sin and death that we may live as the people of God.

This, my dear people loved of God, is what Isaiah shares. He remembers and boasts of a loving Lord, who comes to be with His people and to redeem His people, as He gives Himself for them on a cross, dying to give them life, and living to declare His love day after day, moment after moment.

This is the good news we have been given and which we share. You don't have to be a pastor to share it. You don't have to be an expert in public speaking. You just need the joy of what you have been given, and sharing it with others. If children can overwhelm us with their joy in the gifts we give them, surely it can't be that hard to tell others that we have received a great—a priceless gift—in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Be like children—share what you've been given! Amen.