

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It is hard to miss the excitement of children who are awestruck and overwhelmed with joy at their new gifts. Look! Look what I got! Isn’t it pretty? Did you see what I can build with my new Lego? Listen to my dinosaur roar! Watch how fast my car goes. I like this game. Will you play it with me? Wow, a real walkie-talkie! You have to love the excitement of children who are so eager to share with others the joy that they feel in the gifts they received.

I know that not every child is filled with joy. There are those who are so disappointed that they didn’t get the gift they really wanted that the joy of everything else is lost. Many live in families where parents do not have the means to make their celebration as “merry and bright” as so many do. There is no extra money for presents. It is a struggle just to put food on the table or to have a warm place to sleep. For many adults, too, Christmas is often a sad reminder of the things that cannot be. A beloved spouse died, and we are alone at Christmas. The kids have moved far away and could not be home this year. I think of those who serve in the military and are posted in distant lands. There are no holidays, no vacation, no Christmas break. As we look to the new year, many will look back and think of missed opportunities, heartaches and losses. For many, there is no apparent reason to get excited about these Christmas days or the coming new year; no reason to stand up and sing, “Joy to the World”.

Isaiah sees things differently. Even in the dark days around him, he feels joy in knowing what God has done, is doing and will do for His people. In our Old Testament lesson today Isaiah tells us: ***“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”*** (Isaiah 61:10, ESV) This is good news, and like joyful children who share the excitement of Christmas, it is a joy to be shared. What makes this news so very, very special is that it is good news given to really bad people. We tend to think of people being naughty or nice and we like to think of ourselves as being on the nice list. Yet God has some strong things to say to His people. If you go back a couple of chapters before our text, Isaiah says by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: ***“but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness.”*** (Isaiah 59:2-3, ESV) If we read the longer section, we see things going from bad to worse: ***“Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways.”*** (Isaiah 59:7, ESV) Remember that God speaks this good news of our lessons today to really bad people who had forsaken him, chased after other gods, and committed unspeakable and idolatrous acts.

Isaiah understands that this good news has to be shared in the same way that children want to share, even need to share, their Christmas joy. He says: ***“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch.*** How can we contain such joy and such wonderful news or even think of keeping it to ourselves? Think of the impact that the birth of Christ had on so many people. After the shepherds see the Christ-Child, we are told: ***And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.*** (Luke 2:17-18 - ESV) I imagine that the wise men, after their return home, also spoke to others about the wonders they had seen in the newborn King. In our Gospel lesson we hear how Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to perform the rite of redemption, required of every first-born since the days of the Exodus as a reminder that God had spared their firstborn in the last plague in Egypt. Simeon is led to the temple that day by the Holy Spirit, for we are told that ***“it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”*** (Luke 2:26, ESV) When Simeon sees the Christ-Child and holds Him in his arms, he bursts forth in praise: ***““Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles,***

and for glory to your people Israel.”” (Luke 2:29–32, ESV) Simeon’s glad hymn caught the attention of Anna, a widow who spent her time in the temple in prayer and fasting. Now she comes and sees the baby Jesus, and when she does, we are told: ***“And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”*** (Luke 2:38, ESV)

Just before our sermon, we sang the carol, Go Tell It On the Mountain. *Go tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and ev’rywhere; Go tell it on the mountain That Jesus Christ is born!* (LSB 388) That is what we need to do with our Christmas joy—we need to go and tell others what God has made known to us. If ever there was a time when our world needed the good news that is ours in Christ, surely we are living in that time. In the darkness that sin brings into our world; that darkness which misleads people into seeing themselves as the centre of the universe, people need the light that Isaiah says we have. He wants us to go and tell of Christ so that ***righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch.*** Simeon calls that burning torch of salvation ***“a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”***” (Luke 2:32, ESV) Oh, how our world needs that light! They need to see what God has done for us in giving us His Son. They need to see that Christ has washed away our sin through His sacrifice for us on the cross. They need to see the life that is ours through the risen, living and ascended Lord. They need to see that we are new creations in Christ, that we are different people in Christ. Paul declares: ***“But when the fullness of time had come, 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) This is the hope that we have to share with the world. As Isaiah says, we cannot be silent or hide our light under a bushel because the world needs to see the faith, the joy, the excitement that fills our hearts and lives through the birth of Christ. How can anyone know the love of the Saviour who dies on the cross for their sins, and who rises that they may have life, unless we pass on that good news?

Yesterday, as my wife and I were out running some errands, we saw two different groups of people from the same church standing on street corners, displaying signs that said things like, “Jesus is the resurrection and the life”. “Jesus is Lord”. “I will follow Jesus until the end”. All they did was display the signs and wave to the cars going by. They looked happy to be doing this simple, little task. In their own way, they were going, telling and rejoicing in God’s grace in their lives.

Will everyone listen? Simeon knew that not everyone is going to believe the good news. He told Mary: ***“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”***” (Luke 2:34–35, ESV) No, not everyone will rejoice in the message of the Saviour. But that shouldn’t keep us from passing on what we know and believe. Peter tells us: ***in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.*** (1 Peter 3:15-16 - ESV)

My dear people, loved by God, be the children of God you are! Rejoice with child-like faith and excitement in the gift that God has given you—the gift of forgiveness, life and salvation through His Son, born to redeem you by His death and resurrection. Go and tell others what He has done in giving us His Son. Live in the joy that is yours in the Saviour, born for you. As we speak of the hope we have in the Saviour there are those who will be brought, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to know and see in Him what we see—that light for all; that glory of God who is our forgiveness, our life and our salvation. How can we be silent when we have such wonderful news to share—the news of Christ, our Saviour, our Lord and our Light. Amen.