

Glory to God in the Highest and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests. Amen.

⁷ 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!”

⁸ Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.

⁹ Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. ¹⁰ The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Fellow Worshippers of the Baby in Bethlehem,

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 14:14). Those words from our Gospel lesson describe Baby Jesus, whose birthday we are celebrating today, and they also describe the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy which we have before us today.

Isaiah’s prophecy tells us a lot about our God and Savior. Through his message, Isaiah wants us to understand that, “God Reigns – He is in Control.” Thus God doesn’t leave us out in the cold to fend for ourselves but rather, “He Comes to us with Peace, Joy, and Power,” through the Christ child born in Bethlehem.

I. “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!” Good news is what the people wanted to hear, and peace would be welcome. It was the time of the kings and God’s people had split into two kingdoms – the 10 Northern Tribes and Judah in the south. There was always some kind of battle going on either between the two kingdoms or some neighboring country.

As Isaiah wrote these words we have to note that the 10 Northern tribes had been recently wiped out by the Assyrians – they were gone and there were prophecies that soon Judah would be taken into exile. Isaiah’s message was a bright beacon of hope that pointed to peace. Not peace between nations but rather, peace between God and his people – a spiritual peace.

What the people didn’t know was that peace would come through baby Jesus. The angels announced the news to the shepherds when they sang, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”** (Luke 2:14). Jesus announced this peace when he said, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** (John 14:27).

How beautiful would be the feet of those who bring this message of peace that comes through salvation. Not that these folks had good looking feet but because their feet carried them and their message. As Isaiah prophesied about this message of hope and peace, he was prophesying about the deliverance of Judah from Babylon. This was something in the future but still an ample illustration for the people of the true deliverance that would come through the Christ Child. And Isaiah emphasizes his prophesy with the words, **“Your God Reigns!”** In other

words, God is going to make this happen. Count on it! The anticipation of the fulfillment of this prophecy should have brought the people joy but it didn't because there was a lack of faith and trust in their hearts.

God reigns so that we, too, might receive the glad tidings of peace and salvation. But in the back of your minds you might ask, "Are you sure?" There is so much discontent around us that sometimes it is hard to find the peace that God promises. It would be great if we had world peace but sin and unbelief will never allow that, so how can we find the peace God wants us to have in our lives – that true spiritual peace we all need?

There is only one answer and that is through forgiveness. That we recognize how much God has forgiven us and that we forgive those who sin against us – even if they don't ask us for forgiveness, that we still forgive them in our own hearts. We can only do this with God's help. Isaiah said, **"Your God Reigns!"** and if we let him reign in our hearts through his Word then we can find the peace that he wants us to have through the work of this baby who was born in Bethlehem. And if we let God rule in our lives through his Word we will also see that, along with peace, **Christ also comes to bring us joy.**

II. "Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. ⁹ Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem." What a sharp contrast in the 1st sentence of verse eight. Listen – in other words be quiet so you can hear the message, and then lift up your voices and shout for joy. Almost like a crowd at a sporting event when the official comes out onto the court or field to announce a decisive call. Everyone is quiet so they can hear and when it is a favorable call the crowd erupts with a cheer. They're happy and they let it show.

Isaiah had a message of joy worthy of cheering. The Lord is returning to Zion – another name for Jerusalem and more specifically the temple sight in Jerusalem. That would happen when the people would return from Babylon and rebuild the temple – the dwelling place of the Lord among his people at that time in history. The Lord would return to Zion when that special baby born in Bethlehem, as a grown man, would go to Jerusalem to suffer and die and rise on the 3rd day assuring us that our salvation is complete or as Isaiah put it, assuring us that, **"He has redeemed Jerusalem."**

The Lord will return again in the future to take all believers to a new Zion – the New Jerusalem we will see on Judgment Day. What a comforting message for the people of Judah and for us. All is not lost. The Savior/King has delivered his people. He has delivered us from our sins by bringing us forgiveness through faith and he gives us the sure hope of everlasting life in the New Jerusalem he has prepared for us. What a wonderful reason to celebrate and shout for joy!

There is no doubt that Jesus came to bring joy and yet not everyone is joyful at Christmas time. Maybe a loved one has been recently lost or passed away near the Christmas holidays and it's hard to be happy. Maybe there is family strife and in place of a happy family gathering you

are staying home alone or you go, but instead of joy there is only tension in the air. Maybe there have been some personal setbacks and this Christmas is going to be different than previous ones.

Our sinful nature would have us dwell on the negative and snuff out the joy, but the hope found in the Christ child brings us joyful optimism. If you have lost a loved one, aren't you happy they are in heaven? If there is strife in the family, isn't now a good time to mend fences or if that is impossible, then focus on the joy of celebrating Christmas with friends. If there have been personal changes in your life, there is joy in knowing that your Lord and Savior will help you through these changes, so trust in Him and his Word.

We use the phrase, "The joy of salvation," because Christ came to wipe away our sins and to help us rejoice in his gift of spiritual life that he has given each and every one of us. Isaiah reminds us that this is all possible because God reigns in our lives and he comes in power to help us.

III. "The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God." The picture Isaiah gives us is that the Lord has his mighty arms in the folds of his cloak and now he is about to roll up his sleeves and get to work. As we celebrate the birth of Christ we see God coming into this world to roll up his sleeves and get to work for us.

When Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple, in obedience to the Old Testament laws, Simeon took this child in his arms and said, **"For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people."** (Luke 2:30-31) No doubt Simeon was referring back to this prophecy and the work of salvation Jesus would complete for all of us.

That is really what our celebration is all about today. God's gift of the Christ child to earn salvation for all of us. He did the work we aren't capable of and then brings us the benefit of his work through faith. As we worship this special baby, we see the mighty power of our God who sent his Son to bring us peace.

May this good news of the Christ Child's birth and God's great love for you bring you peace and joy today and every day as we recognize that God reigns for the benefit of all believers – that he reigns in our hearts for our benefit. Amen.