

## Sermon for December 25, 2016 – Christmas Day

### Isaiah 52:7-10 (EHV)

#### Theme: Listen! Did You Hear The Good News?

*Our God has come to work out our salvation*

<sup>7</sup>How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of a herald, who announces peace and preaches good news. He announces salvation and says to Zion, “Your God is king!” <sup>8</sup>The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voices. Together they shout for joy, because with both eyes they will see it when the LORD returns to Zion. <sup>9</sup>Break out, shout for joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, because the LORD is comforting his people. He is redeeming Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup>The LORD lays bare his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation from our God.

Over the mountains he ran, his lungs gasping for air and his heart bursting with excitement. The trek was long, but he didn't care. He had great news for the people of his city. Filled with joy over the victory he had just witnessed, this soldier pressed on, running over rough, rocky ground, up, down and around the mountains. As soon as he was in ear shot of the watchmen, he cried out as loud as his exhausted lungs would allow: “Victory! Victory!”

The watchmen who heard him from the distance could not believe their ears. Did they hear him correctly? Was he yelling, “victory”? Yes, it's true. “Victory! Victory!” the watchmen began shouting with the herald. Soon the whole city was jubilantly cheering!

And now you know the ancient legend from which the modern Marathon stems. A soldier named Pheidippides ran from the plains of Marathon to Athens (26 miles) to announce the Greek victory over the Persians. Why was this news so important? Because it originally looked like the Greek army was doomed. They faced an enemy 4 times larger than them. Most thought that Athens was lost. But victory, oh, how joyous the news! It was an announcement that the Greeks never forgot.

Last night we heard a more thrilling announcement than the one Pheidippides brought to Athens. Let us recall and rejoice in the good news of Christ's birth under the theme: ***Listen! Did you hear the good news? Our God has come to work out our salvation.***

Our sermon text is taken from a section of the Old Testament book of Isaiah, where the Lord promised to send a special servant who would save his people from their sins. A few verses before our text the Lord talks about his deliverance in this way: *"You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed."*

The LORD knew that we could not free ourselves from our slavery to sin, death and the power of the devil. Only he could do it. He could not use gold or silver either. No, he had to use something much more costly to pay for our freedom: the life blood of his beloved Son. But our Lord loved us so much that he was willing to pay that price. He sent his Son to earth to be our Savior.

Therefore, on a Judean night not unlike any other, while shepherds were out in the fields tending their flocks, the sky ripped open and a host of beautiful, heavenly messengers appeared over the mountains surrounding Bethlehem – announcing the good news of Jesus' birth to a group of shepherds.

How beautiful the sight must have been! How wonderful their message! The shepherds were told that a Savior had been born, who would bring “peace” to earth. And why was this message important? Because, prior to Christ, God and mankind were at odds with each other. Even though God created the human race, our first father and mother rebelled against him. And this rebellious nature has been passed down from generation to generation. By nature people hate God and oppose his will.

Now some of you might be thinking: “I don’t ever remember hating God before I became a Christian, so how can you say that I did?” Think of it this way: if we were to take Christ out of the picture and only had God’s law, how could we not hate God? Why? Because He asks us to do things that our sinful nature does not want to do. God demands a perfection that no mere human can achieve. God threatens so severe a punishment for those who disobey him that we would be left to despair. Yes, if we were without Christ, we would hate God. Our sinful natures are at enmity with him.

But God did not want this. He wanted to save the human race from its sin. So what did God do? He took on human flesh and blood. Is there any greater sign of peace? The baby born in Bethlehem is true God and true man. The two that were at enmity are united in Christ Jesus. He came to win peace for us by forgiving our sins so that we might always be united with God. He is our Savior.

An interesting aspect of our sermon text is that it stands right before one of the most moving portions of Old Testament Scripture, which talks about how the Christ would suffer and die to win our salvation, how he would be crushed for our sins and bruised for our iniquities. The punishment that brings us peace would be upon him and by his wounds we would be healed. In other words, the only way our salvation could be accomplished was for a divine Savior to perfectly keep God’s law for us and suffer His severe punishment for sin in our place. And this is exactly what the Son of God took on human flesh to do. This was the message the angels had for the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks near Bethlehem. It was a victory message that brought them great joy.

*<sup>7</sup>How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of a herald, who announces peace and preaches good news. He announces salvation and says to Zion, “Your God is king!” <sup>8</sup>The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voices. Together they shout for joy, because with both eyes they will see it when the LORD returns to Zion.*

Imagine being there and hearing the news the shepherds heard: The LORD has kept his promise. The LORD has returned to his people. Oh, the joy! Is it true? Has he really returned? The shepherds ran to Bethlehem to see it with their own eyes, and behold: there was the baby they heard about. There was his young mother, a virgin. With their own eyes the Shepherds saw their salvation: the LORD incarnate lying on a bed of hay.

*<sup>9</sup>Break out, shout for joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, because the LORD is comforting his people. He is redeeming Jerusalem.*

The Shepherds were so overjoyed at what they heard and saw that they had to tell others. They ran through out the streets of their little town singing the praise of God, waking up all they could with their wonderful message. I am sure that there were some who were not happy with the shepherds waking them up from their sleep, but the shepherds didn't care. Mankind sat in the ruin of sin. All had seemed lost, but look: here shines the hope of victory. The LORD himself has come to comfort his people. He has come to redeem them from their sins. This news could not wait!

*<sup>10</sup>The LORD lays bare his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation from our God.*

Consider what the Lord was doing at Christmas: he was rolling up his sleeves to do the dirty work of saving us. He had to do it because there was no one who could do it for him. The Lord spoke through Isaiah: *<sup>5</sup> I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me.*<sup>ii</sup> God worked out our salvation, showing his strength and love. He did it in full view of the world, that all might see it and believe in him.

You know, we believers are a lot like the shepherds. No, angels did not appear to us in the fields, but at some point in our lives a messenger did come and tell us the good news about Christ. This messenger might have been a parent, grandparent, friend, relative, pastor or teacher. How beautiful this messenger is to us! Why? Because of the wonderful message he or she proclaimed: redemption, forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and everlasting life through faith in God's Son! And what was our response to this news? Like the Shepherds, we had to go see if it was true. We ran to the Bible and there we saw with our very own eyes of faith that which the shepherds saw. It is true: God has come to earth to save us from our sins!

And what was our response? Like the Shepherds, we were overjoyed! I love seeing the joy that new Christians have for the Gospel. They are often so fired up that they can't help but tell other people the wonderful news they heard and believed. They often confess Christ so fearlessly that they can put mature Christians to shame. And that brings me to my next point: where is that Christmas zeal with us?

Some times the trials of life get us down. Sometimes we think that, because we have heard this message so much, it is yesterday's news. The devil is always trying to take our zeal for the Gospel away. But let me tell you: the message of God taking on human flesh and blood to save us from our sins is never old news. There are many people on this earth who either haven't heard or do not understand this message. They are still at enmity with God - under the devil's power. They have no peace. How will they believe and be saved if they don't hear the message? How will they hear if they are not told? Having heard the message ourselves, how can we not be like the Shepherds of Bethlehem and share this news with them?

Yes, some people will be annoyed with us as they were annoyed with the shepherds. They do not want to be awakened from their spiritual slumber. But all who believe the Gospel we share will

be saved. St. Paul speaks of this in Romans 10: *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* <sup>14</sup> *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?* <sup>15</sup> *And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news! . . ."* <sup>17</sup> *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.* <sup>iii</sup>

Marathons are still run today - all in memory of the good news of Athens' deliverance from the Persians. If this event is remembered, which is of absolutely no consequence to us, how much more should we remember the great message of deliverance from sin, death and the devil God brought about by sending his Son into the world? How much more should we remember the race the shepherds ran to tell all they could of the Lord's deliverance? This message has meaning for every person alive today.

So don't be afraid to tell everyone you know about your Savior. Don't worry about what they will think or how you can convince them of the truth. Just do what the shepherds did and share the good news that you yourself have heard. Say to them: **Listen! Did you hear the good news? Our God has come to work out our salvation.** Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> Isaiah 52:3 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Isaiah 63:5 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> Romans 10:13-15, 17 NIV84